

Tragic Coleridge

Chris Murray

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For Claire

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Abbreviations

CL *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956–1971)

CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, M.Christensen and A.J. Harding, 5 vols in 2 Parts: Text and Notes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–2002)

In *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, general ed. Kathleen Coburn, Bollingen Series, 75, 16 vols (New Jersey and London: Princeton University Press, 1969–2001):

BL *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (1983)

CM *Marginalia*, ed. by George Whalley and H.J. Jackson, 6 vols (1980–2001)

EoT *Essays on his Times*, ed. by David V. Erdman, 3 vols (1978)

Friend *The Friend*, ed. by Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols (1969)

Lects 1795 *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*, ed. by Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (1971)

LoL *Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature*, ed. by R.A. Foakes, 2 vols (1987)

LS *Lay Sermons*, ed. by R.J. White (1972)

OM *Opus Maximum*, ed. by Thomas McFarland (2002)

PW *Poetical Works*, ed. by J.C.C. Mays, 3 vols (2001)

SWF *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. by H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols (1995)

TT *Table Talk*, ed. by Carl Woodring, 2 vols (1990)

Watchman *The Watchman*, ed. by Lewis Patton (1970)

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Introduction:

Romantic Tragedy and Tragic Romanticism

In an 1808 lecture Coleridge muses on the destruction of the tragic hero. He explains that the hero is sacrificed to Dionysus, the god ‘representative of the <organic> energies of the Universe, that work by passion and Joy without apparent distinct consciousness—and rather as the cause or condition of skill and contrivance, than the result.’¹ In 1813 he envisions Dionysus, ‘the symbol of that power which acts without our consciousness from the vital energies of nature,’ in opposition to Apollo, ‘the symbol of our intellectual consciousness’.² When there is imbalance between these forces there is discord. Catastrophe follows, in which the hero is annihilated. For the tragedian to witness these conflicting energies evokes Coleridge’s description of the storm in *King Lear*:

Its ear-cleaving Thunder Claps, its meteoric splendors [...], the contagion & fearful sympathies of Nature, the Fates the Furies, the frenzied Elements dance in and out, now breaking thro’ and scattering, now hand in hand, with the fierce or fantastic group of Human Passions, Crimes and Anguishes, reeling <on the unsteady ground> in a wild harmony to the Swell and Sink of the Earthquake.³

The tragedian must make sense of such confusion. He channels turmoil into art and interprets it morally and religiously, because it is his duty; or hers, for the Cumaean Sibyl appeals to Coleridge as a kind of tragic artist. Possibly the tragedian is divinely inspired, and possibly he is insane. The 1808 lecture series was on Principles of Poetry. To be a poet, as Coleridge conceives it, one remains true to the origin of the role in the ancient tragedian.

‘Romantic tragedy’ is a disputed term. In this introduction I survey critics who claim that there is no such thing as ‘Romantic tragedy’ and others who use the term only in reference to a small body of plays by the major authors. I suggest ‘Tragic Romanticism’ as an alternative to signify literature in the spirit of Classical tragedy, if not necessarily stage plays. The problem remains that ‘tragedy’ is its own word-puzzle of arguing critics and incompatible definitions. While this critical context is important, the tragic is a deeply personal concept to Coleridge. His solution to the lack of a consistently defined practice to follow in tragedy is to make innovative use of influences, philosophical precepts and written forms, but they remain essentially tragic.

‘The tragic’ I define as literature that depicts catastrophe and emphasizes pathos. Catastrophe is misfortune of widespread significance, not solely personal experience. Thus the lovers’ suicides in *Romeo and Juliet* are sad, but the play

¹ *LoL*, I, pp. 44–5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 518.

³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 376.

achieves tragedy in the depiction of an age-old feud that has involved innocent parties and death on the streets of Verona. Pathos is also a crucial characteristic of the tragic. Aeschylus' tragedy *Persians* explores the mass bereavement following war, but while the epic *Iliad* also concerns war, pathos does not emerge as the dominant trait of a poem steeped in the details of combat and the nature of heroism.

As I offer the above formulation of the tragic I am obliged to place it in the tradition of scholarship on the subject, and to address possible objections. The original referent of the Greek *tragōdos* – a song about a goat – is unknown, although goats as playwrights' prizes, sacrifices and auditors might all be suggested. The legacy of this uncertainty is critics' inability to agree on how tragedy should be defined. In recent decades this has manifested in some very tentative delineations of what constitutes tragedy. For example, Peter Brooks brings forth the cautious speculation that 'some form of reconciliation to the Sacred is probably indispensable.'⁴ The solution of David Farrell Krell is to define tragedy in very general terms, which resonate with philosophical readings of tragedy but also seem to strip the tradition of any political or historical significance: 'the φύσει οντα, the entire nature of the universe [...] is [...] in some sense itself tragic.'⁵ Terry Eagleton, who bemoans that 'no definition other than "very sad" has ever worked', does not make a distinction between academic and everyday uses of the word 'tragedy', and so risks leaving the future of literary studies in the hands of the tabloid press.⁶ Exasperated by such loose definitions, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz attempts to re-establish the magnitude of tragedy: 'the word should at least be reserved for situations of great suffering.'⁷

One effect of uncertain scholarship is that older critical studies have remained influential by their strength of conviction. An uncompromized definition is evidently more readily quotable than a hesitant one, and can achieve an air of authority by its neglect of dissonant opinion. George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* is one such book, first published in 1961 and still exerting considerable influence. However, Steiner advances his hypothesis from a base of texts that misleads in its selectivity. Steiner does not comment on such plays as Sophocles' *Philoctetes* or Euripides' *Helen*, in which the reversal of fortune is from bad to good, the inverse of his tragic model. To achieve clarity Steiner devises an exclusive definition by which very few works can actually be termed 'tragedy'. He declares that 'tragedy is irreparable', that 'there can be no compensation', and that

⁴ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 107.

⁵ David Farrell Krell, 'A small number of houses in a universe of tragedy: notes on Aristotle's *περί ποιητικής* and Holderlin's "Ammerkungen"', in *Philosophy and Tragedy*, ed. by Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks, Warwick Studies in European Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 88–116 (p. 95).

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 3.

⁷ Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy*, Blackwell Introductions to the Classical World (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 13.

the advent of Christianity allows ‘only partial or episodic tragedy’.⁸ Thus Steiner whittles away the canon with the key point that there can no longer be tragedy, an opinion which he derives from W.B. Yeats. Declaring that ‘it is no longer possible to write “The Persians”, “Agincourt”, “Chevy Chase”’, Yeats discounts the strife of his age as inglorious: ‘some blunderer has driven his car on to the wrong side of the road – that is all.’ I suspect that Yeats would have felt otherwise had Maud Gonne been in the passenger seat. At times his commentary is inconsistent with his own creative practice. Yeats’s claim that World War I poetry should be omitted from anthologies because ‘passive suffering is not a theme for poetry’ is curiously at odds with his work ‘An Irish Airman Foresees his Death’ (1919) for Lady Augusta Gregory’s son, who died piloting an aeroplane for the RAF.⁹ ‘Passive suffering’ is a problematic phrase too; I am not certain how productively Prometheus could suffer while chained to a rock, and surely there was some human decision in the warfare and revolution of Yeats’s lifetime. Thus the criteria by which Yeats considers works to be tragic are questionable. One clear example of how diversely tragedy can be defined, and the critical problems that arise for that reason, occurs in a study of twentieth-century modern Irish tragedy. The title, *Amid Our Troubles*, is a quotation from Yeats endowed with significance by later political resonances of the word ‘troubles’.¹⁰ But crucially, the volume’s editors, who compare the ‘social and political’ conditions of Ireland to those of ancient Greece, specify what constitutes tragedy by reference to different criteria from Yeats’s voluntary *agon* and joyous annihilation.¹¹ Thus the editors do not quite refute Yeats, but argue contrarily by defining the tragic on alternate but equally valid grounds by use of Yeats’s own terminology.

With such uncertainty over what formally constitutes tragedy, there is wisdom in the advice of F.R. Leavis to his students, as reported by H.A. Mason, that ‘tragedy is something you will have to *invent* for yourselves’.¹² It seems most pragmatic for a scholar to cultivate a *sense* of tragedy, comparable to a sense of irony, which is better gleaned from a few choice examples from *Macbeth* than a rigid definition. This book concerns how Coleridge invents tragedy for himself, using materials from various literary and philosophical traditions. Many of his works manifest a tragic vision that is a philosophy of life as opposed to a mere collection of allusions to and derivations from predecessors. Before a discussion of how tragedy functions philosophically in Coleridge’s works, I want to give an overview of how he theorizes the mode in his criticism.

⁸ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), pp. 8, 129, 332.

⁹ *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. by W.B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. xxxiv.

¹⁰ *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedies*, ed. by Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen Drama, 2002).

¹¹ J. Michael Walton, ‘Hit or Myth: The Greeks and Irish Drama’, in *Amid Our Troubles*, pp. 3–36 (p. 35).

¹² H.A. Mason, *The Tragic Plane* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 1.

Unlike the later Steiner and his *Death of Tragedy* school, Coleridge does not believe that tragedy has finished. Nor does he confine it to the ancient past. Coleridge accepts that tragedy has changed over time, but it has not become an entirely different or a less authentic mode: 'the chain was never wholly broken', he claims in an 1808 lecture, 'tho' the connecting Links were often of baser metal.' This sense of continuity is evident in Coleridge's claim that Shakespeare 'proceeded in the same process' as the ancient Greek tragedians, despite his deviations from Aristotle's 'rules'. Comparably, Coleridge claims in 1812 that if Sophocles and Shakespeare could have switched places in history they would nonetheless have been eminent dramatists, as they had 'shown a genius of the same nature'.¹³ Not all critics would corroborate such statements; A.C. Bradley for one finds fault with Coleridge's discussion of *Macbeth* in terms of fates which he considers too Classical.¹⁴ Thus there is a simplification in Coleridge's identification of commonality in great tragedians. Nor would all scholars allow Coleridge's informal conception of tragedy; he does not confine tragedy to dramatic form. Coleridge refers to the collaborative ballad 'The Three Graves', for example, as 'tragic' in his introductory note to the poem. However, while he allows non-dramatic art forms to be considered tragedy, Coleridge has a scholarly reserve about the word 'tragedy', which he uses in relation to suffering of magnitude, but does not apply casually to mishaps or sad events.

Ultimately, tragedy is a positive mode for Coleridge. In his introduction to his play *Zapolya* (1818) he refers in general terms to 'the plan of the ancients, of which one specimen is left us in the Æschylean Trilogy of the Agamemnon, the Orestes, and the Eumenides.'¹⁵ In lecture notes of 1813 Coleridge writes a scheme of how he believes the individual parts of *The Oresteia* correspond to one modern tragedy:

1st. Act would be the Usurpation of Aegisthus, and Murder of Agamemnon.

2nd. Revenge of Orestes, and Murder of his Mother.

3rd. The Trial of Orestes before the Gods.¹⁶

Here Coleridge assumes that all Greek tragedies formed trilogies which, like Aeschylus' trilogy *The Oresteia*, ended in reconciliation. The belief that Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* was but the first play of a lost trilogy that ended in liberation and celebration was held in Coleridge's time as it is now. Yet it was not a widespread belief that all tragedies ultimately ended well, which is the 'plan of the ancients' that Coleridge extrapolates from *The Oresteia*. There is nothing demonstrably wrong with Coleridge's speculation on the tradition of the trilogy in Greek tragedy: so few of the ancient texts have survived that Classicists must often rely on conjecture, and Coleridge's conjecture is learned. But he posits belief in a

¹³ *LoL*, I, pp. 48, 201, 432.

¹⁴ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 2nd edn (London: The Macmillan Press, 1905; repr. 1978), p. 287.

¹⁵ *PW*, III.2, p. 1338.

¹⁶ *LoL*, I, p. 518.

general practice that not many theorists would venture. David Hume is one major influence on Coleridge who reminds the reader that tragedies can ‘end happily’.¹⁷ The philosophical importance of Coleridge’s belief that tragedy is a positive mode is that his apprehension of a beneficial purpose to tragic sacrifice renders it compatible with Christianity. This parallels the manner in which Coleridge turned to the Early Christian Fathers, via Ralph Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), to reconcile Greek philosophy with his theological position by arguing that the Greek thinkers were taught by Moses.¹⁸ In a letter to William Sotheby of 1802 on the subject of Euripides, Coleridge insists that ‘Atonement is altogether in the Spirit of Paganism, but Repentance is <Eternity> altogether Christian’; he detects a connection, although the type of metal varies, that connects disparate concepts in his philosophy.¹⁹ I proceed to argue that eventually Coleridge becomes uneasy with tragedy even as a redemptive mode. In time he relinquishes tragedy because he doubts whether the positive ends of the trilogy really are compatible with the orthodox Christianity he has by then adopted. Comparably, I think it is for his lack of philosophical interest that Coleridge has very little to say on the satyr play, which concluded the presentation of tragedies in ancient Greece, and he does not indicate a supposition of any connection between it and the tragic trilogy other than being staged together.

Tragedy could and did exist during the Romantic period, but rarely in the form of stage tragedies. More often it is detectable as an inflection, a Tragic Romanticism. Steiner concedes that the ‘Romantic mode [...] is a dramatization’ at whose heart he identifies ‘an explicit attempt to revitalize the major forms of tragedy.’ But because he restricts the mode to a paradigm of stage tragedy Steiner concludes with a declaration of ‘total mechanical failure’ in Romantic attempts to execute tragedy.²⁰ Rightly, Jeffrey N. Cox indicates Steiner’s excessive conservatism: ‘any author offering an “innovative tragedy” will be seen as contributing to the death of the form’. It is the ‘tragic vision’ rather than form that Cox argues unites Romantic authors:

[They] protested against the idea that any set of formal rules defines the tragic. They sought to replace a definition of the form of tragedy with a definition of the tragic vision [...]. The tragic was no longer identified with a particular aesthetic form, but rather with a vision or philosophy of life.²¹

While Cox studies the tragic vision broadly, with concentration on European Romanticism, I think that his argument can be teased out into different examples

¹⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Dover Philosophical Classics (Mineola, New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2003), p. 262.

¹⁸ See Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 18ff.

¹⁹ *SWF*, p. 120.

²⁰ *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 108, 123, my italics.

²¹ Jeffrey N. Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England and France* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. xi–14.

of how tragedy was reinvented during the British Romantic period. For example, in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816), Byron achieves tragic pathos in a literal occurrence of *apostrophe* in which he sets aside personal grief to consider the widespread hardship of the Napoleonic wars:

I turn'd to thee, to thousands, of whom each
And one as all a ghastly gap did make
In his own kind and kindred, whom to teach
Forgetfulness were mercy for their sake.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III.xxxi.1–4)

Arguably the most accomplished novel of the period, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is a philosophical reworking of Aeschylean drama, in which it is the product of promethean fire, rather than an affronted deity, that persecutes the protagonist. John Keats, whose tragic vision of all Romantic authors is closest to Coleridge's as I define it, argues in a letter of 1819 for the beneficial experience of strife in 'the Vale of Soul-making'. Notwithstanding the clichéd arguments that Keats is impeded by a lack of Classical scholarship, he perceives the essence of tragic experience as it occurs in works from *Oedipus at Colonus* to *King Lear*: 'Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to School the Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!' ²² 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819), like the example from *Childe Harold*, rises from individual melancholy to tragedy to contemplate the 'hungry generations' through history ('Ode to a Nightingale', l. 62). To Thomas McFarland, ancient Greek thought – albeit acquired in translation – provides Keats with 'the mask of Hellas', which the poet assumes to acquire a guise of authority and to experience beauty. ²³ For Coleridge the tragic functions differently: Coleridge's Greek tragic influences are not invoked solely for personal reassurance, but as a tool with which a troubled thinker analyses the universe in poetical works and philosophy.

Coleridge and Tragic Thought

In a sonnet of 1825, Coleridge writes on the impossibility of functioning in a spirit of negativity:

WORK without Hope draws nectar in a sieve;
And HOPE without an Object cannot live.
(*'Work without Hope'*, ll. 13–14)

²² *The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958; repr. 1976), II, p. 102.

²³ Thomas McFarland, *The Masks of Keats: The Endeavour of a Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

It is pointless to speculate on whether Coleridge has made an incorrect deduction about reconciliatory Greek trilogies, or whether his parallel of ‘atonement’ in tragedy and ‘repentance’ in Christianity is viable to scholars of theology or tragedy. The real crux of his attitude is that he *needs* tragedy to be a positive mode. Coleridge would not engage so frequently with tragedy if he could not extract a positive philosophy from it. In *Table Talk*, Coleridge claims a lasting dedication to hopefulness, even in consideration of the historical tumult during his lifetime: ‘I was an optimist, but as I could not but see that the present state of things was not the *best*, I was necessarily led to look to a future state.’²⁴ In this book I study tragedy as Coleridge’s engagement with catastrophe in search of philosophical benefit. As an author he identifies with the ancient tragedians, whose audiences Coleridge imagines are edified by the human destruction they witness, as he portrays in *Biographia Literaria* (1817):

They wished to transport the mind to a sense of its possible greatness during the temporary oblivion of the worthless ‘thing, we are’ and of the peculiar state, in which each man *happens* to be; suspending our individual recollections and lulling them to sleep amid the music of nobler thoughts.²⁵

Here Coleridge adopts a sense of shared aesthetic experience derived from Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), who writes of tragedy as a mode that ‘weakens the feeling of our individuality by constantly referring to universal laws, that teaches us to lose our miniscule selves in the context of a larger whole.’²⁶ But in Coleridge’s works the tragic effect is not limited to stage tragedies, and the shared experience can be between author and reader, or speaker and auditor. This reflects a relaxation of the restrictions of literary form, ‘a shift in culture’, as John Beer describes it, ‘by which the literary arts had become more intertwined with one another.’²⁷ Coleridge also has inherently dramatic qualities as a histrionic and performative person, to the extent that it is no surprise that the tragic touches all manner of works. Hence too Coleridge’s interest in psychologies of tragic experience, which gives rise to some of his best Shakespearean criticism and the theory of dramatic illusion, and reflects a relatively new debate over how the tragic gives what Edmund Burke terms ‘a very high species of pleasure’, a matter that Hume also explores.²⁸ Coleridge is not drawn to analyse the formal constituents of tragedy at length, but is more interested in such philosophical applications. Repeatedly in poems,

²⁴ *TT*, I, p. 489.

²⁵ *BL*, II, p. 186.

²⁶ Friedrich Schiller, ‘On the Art of Tragedy’, trans. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom, in *Essays*, ed. by Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, The German Library, 17 (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 1–21 (p. 4).

²⁷ John Beer, ‘Coleridge’s Dramatic Imagination’, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 29 (2007), 43–9 (p. 43).

²⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958; repr. Routledge Classics, 2008), p. 44.

plays, letters, notebook entries and studies of tragedy in critical works, Coleridge articulates his philosophy of tragic sacrifice: that catastrophe must yield benefit, whether in works of fiction or real events.

To establish how Coleridge's tragic vision functions philosophically I draw attention to two studies that are not primarily concerned with what tragedy is formally, but offer invaluable theories of why it arose and thus how tragic thought operates. The first is René Girard's aetiological study of sacrifice, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972). While I cannot do justice to the nuances of Girard's book in synopsis, as introductory matter I acknowledge my debt to his study of the protective function of tragedy. Girard proceeds from a Freudian perspective that law arises from actions that society deems unacceptable retrospectively. He hypothesizes that in tragedy a collective attempts to prevent the occurrence of violence by diverting it to a sacrificial victim, although in the representative rather than literal context of theatre. Thus tragedy aims to complement the restrictive force of law by channelling destructive energies. The assumption underlies this effort that the inclination to conflict can be purged in shared experience. To Girard tragedy evolves endlessly as society refines a cathartic mechanism for humanity's inherent potential for violence, which is the cause of crisis. At times Coleridge accords with or anticipates Girard's study, and at others he does not, but their common belief in the social function of tragedy is essential to my argument.

A useful supplement to Girard's anthropological account of sacrifice is Geoffrey Brereton's analysis of the development of tragic narratives in *Principles of Tragedy* (1968). Brereton posits the historical figure of the Corn King as an archetypal victim of tragic sacrifice:

The King [...] is appointed for a fixed term, during which he receives all the respect and honour due to his royal standing. At the end of the term he is taken out and ceremonially slaughtered and his blood is sprinkled on the fields as an offering to the mysterious powers which determine the quality of the crops [...]. The transgressions of the community are transferred symbolically to the sacrificial King, who goes to his death loaded with excellence and sin.²⁹

Brereton identifies the sacrifice of the Corn King as a practice that originated tragedy, and he cites Christ as the greatest agent of redemption in that tradition. Further commonplaces of tragedy are evident in this account: the great leader brought low; the scapegoat for collective guilt. The ritual of the Corn King is re-enacted in the fall of tragic protagonists like Prometheus, Oedipus and Antigone. Subsequently I will study Coleridge's characters as they revive and vary this tradition – such as Robespierre, Osorio/Ordonio, Cain, and the Ancient Mariner – but as a predicate for my argument I emphasize humanity's primal need for redemption as Brereton posits it. This is the existential origin of Coleridge's tragic vision.

Coleridge's criticism includes no complete theory of tragedy, and his poetical works do not enact a tragic process with consistency, but the impulse to seek

²⁹ Geoffrey Brereton, *Principles of Tragedy: A Rational Examination of the Tragic Concept in Life and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 49–50.

redemption in crisis is common to many of his creations in various forms. In Chapter 2 I examine suffering in Coleridge's works and argue that he intends the reader or audience to experience it vicariously for the purpose of spiritual benefit. This aim accords with the function Coleridge identifies in Greek tragedy, and where he depicts catastrophe in his works, often he uses devices found in ancient drama. The tragic tradition provides Coleridge with tools to analyse the problems of evil and responsibility for transgressive actions. Tragedy relates also to philosophical interests such as free will, Necessitarianism and animal magnetism. In Chapter 3 I examine Coleridge's tendency to read history and contemporary events as tragedy: he identifies processes of crisis and redemption for political purposes. While I address the rejection of Coleridge's play *Osorio* (1797) initially in Chapter 4, I argue that Coleridge's response to the incident instigates lifelong patterns of salvaging doomed literary projects. I raise such critical themes as synecdoche, the literary fragment and reader-response theory in relation to Coleridge's reinvention of ancient tragic structures and devices. In Chapter 5 I turn to Romantic theatre. I challenge a popular notion in modern scholarship that Coleridge was prejudiced against theatre. I demonstrate that, in his two staged dramas, he criticizes the conventions of contemporary theatre, but also exploits them. Coleridge does not endorse the mode of 'closet drama' but calls for a reform in the conventions of staged tragedy. In Chapter 6 I argue that Coleridge's assumed authority as a tragic thinker is related to his lifelong efforts to establish himself as a sage. From youth Coleridge depicts himself as an embattled, prophetic figure, and likens himself to Cassandra. With reference to W.B. Yeats's depictions of Coleridge as sage, I examine the various techniques Coleridge employs to establish himself as a survivor of and commentator on catastrophe. He achieves his desired status in three books published from 1816–17: *Sibylline Leaves*, *Biographia Literaria* and *The Statesman's Manual*. Finally in Chapter 7 I contend that the later Coleridge, settled into orthodox Christianity, abandons the tragic philosophy. He expresses fears that suffering might be in vain, and therefore that catastrophe should be avoided both in reality and as a literary theme. Ironically, Coleridge clarifies this change in a lecture on Aeschylus.

I do not read events of Coleridge's life as tragic, because the magnitude of suffering therein does not accord to my definition of the mode. That Coleridge himself would have audiences believe that he is a tragic figure, as I discuss later, is a different matter, and is not reliant on particular occurrences but rather a mixture of self-perception and melodramatic social-performance. The domain of my study thus established, I wish to refine what I mean by Coleridge's tragic vision by assessment of his key influences within the mode.

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Chapter 1

Coleridge's Tragic Influences

Diverse tragic thinkers influenced Coleridge: authors, critics, philosophers and performers. He was educated at Christ's Hospital and Jesus College, Cambridge, attended lectures at Göttingen in 1799, was a famously voracious reader, and interacted with various stage managers, playwrights, actors and actresses during his life. Postponing Coleridge's involvement with theatre for a dedicated chapter, I wish to discuss his reception of tragic influences in three loose contexts: his formal education at school and university, his reading of English tragedy and his debts to German literature and philosophy.

First I turn to Coleridge's interest in Classical tragedy, by far the most neglected of the influences I discuss. Bruce Graver is correct to evaluate the lack of attention to Classics in modern criticism as 'an extraordinary gap in Romantic scholarship'.¹ Anthony John Harding has made several scholarly contributions on the subject of Coleridge's Classical interests, most recently in the *Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (2009), but subjugates Classical literature and philosophy to religion. Harding is correct to observe that Coleridge 'did not consistently separate his biblical theological studies from his work on Classical literature, nor either of these from his philosophical interests' because he 'remained unconfined by disciplinary boundaries'.² Yet in some of Coleridge's musings on Classics, religion is only evident as a limiting presence when he fears that his philosophical reach might breach Christian propriety. In other interactions with Classics, and tragedy specifically, the Bible has no relevance at all. The problem is not misconception on Harding's part but that he, as probably the leading authority on Coleridge's Classical reading, explores Classics primarily as a tangential interest of Coleridge's theology. Elsewhere Harding has a chapter on Coleridge's 1825 lecture on *Prometheus Bound*, but under the rubric of 'reception of myth' – as distinguished from drama – he is compelled to offer little commentary on Aeschylus' play, while I find that the central problem of the lecture lies in Coleridge's reception of the tragedy.³ Comparably, Elinor Shaffer alludes to the Prometheus lecture as 'one of Coleridge's most underrated and least discussed works', but her primary interest is in Coleridge's dialogue with

¹ Bruce Graver, 'Romanticism', in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Craig W. Kallendorf (Oxford: Blackwell Books, 2007), pp. 72–86 (p. 73).

² Anthony John Harding, 'Coleridge: Biblical and Classical Literature', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 455–72 (p. 456).

³ Anthony John Harding, *The Reception of Myth in British Romanticism* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1995), pp. 230–59.

German philosophy rather than anything Coleridge has to say about Aeschylus or tragedy.⁴

Among his peers Coleridge was recognized as an expert on Graeco-Roman thought and texts. A Prospectus appears in John Stoddart's newspaper the *New Times* for one of Coleridge's lecture courses in 1818 in which it is written that Coleridge possesses 'classical attainments of the highest degree'.⁵ Of the broad selection of literary figures studied under modern canons of Romanticism, only the careers of Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley are documented in *The Dictionary of British Classicists* (2004). While the entry for Shelley offers rather a dour account of his Classical interests, the praise for Coleridge is strong:

Coleridge's Classical learning [...] pervaded every area of his intellectual life – from the most opium-induced poetic stanza to the most fleeting of marginalia or the most fully worked out of his literary or philosophical views. He edited no classical text or poem; he discovered no grammatical or prosodic law. Yet he was in many ways the most multiply talented, deep thinking and influential of that long line of English classicists who consecrated their profound erudition to our understanding of the sacred rather than the profane.⁶

Three aspects of studies in ancient drama during Coleridge's lifetime have particular relevance to understanding his knowledge: the increased attention to tragedy within academic studies of the Classics; the salience of modern vernacular tragedies influenced by Classical drama in Europe; and in Britain the neglect of the original Greek tragedies outside of academic environments. The latter led Coleridge to complain in 1811 that 'Pope's popular translation [of Homer] was in the hand, nay, in the mouth of every person—while the translations of Sophocles of Aeschylus, or Euripides were found only in the libraries of those who did not want them, scarcely making any impression on the community at large.'⁷

To British school students, Senecan and Greek tragedies were taught on curricula with the assumption that the ancient texts were morally beneficial. Dutifully, Coleridge reiterates this popular truism in a school exercise for James Boyer of 1790, perhaps with an air of having the teacher standing by him in the act of writing:

Few ever possessed an intimate knowledge of the Greek authors, who did not receive them as the Models, as well as the Fathers, of Poetry, History and the Drama—yet greater will be our veneration for them, if we conceive them as influencing the [art of] departments of life [...]. Their systems of Morality bordered as near on Perfection, as the efforts of Humanity are able.⁸

⁴ Elinor Shaffer, 'Coleridge's Dialogues with German Thought', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, pp. 555–71 (p. 563).

⁵ Quoted in *LoL*, II, p. 27.

⁶ *The Dictionary of British Classicists*, ed. by Robert B. Todd and others, 3 vols (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), III, pp. 884–5; I, p. 189.

⁷ *LoL*, I, pp. 226–7.

⁸ *SWF*, pp. 6–7.

It was commonly believed in the eighteenth century that a Classical education would yield greater advancement in life, as Lord Chesterfield exemplifies in a letter to his son in 1748: 'Dear Boy [...], Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for everybody; because everybody has agreed to think and to call it so. And the word *illiterate*, in its common acceptation, means a man who is ignorant of those two languages.'⁹ While such beliefs generally remained consistent, Coleridge's education occurred during a period of significant changes in Classical scholarship. Academics granted Greek tragedy an unprecedented pre-eminence. First, it was in the eighteenth century that Latin ceased to be taught as a living language for conversation in schools and universities. Virtually all lectures at Cambridge were delivered in English rather than Latin at the end of the century, while the reverse had been the case at its beginning. Secondly, at the end of Coleridge's schooldays, and the commencement of his university career, Classical studies underwent a very abrupt shift in emphasis. The assumption of Roman *exempla* by the French Revolutionaries caused British Classicists to favour Hellenism to the detriment of Latin scholarship.¹⁰ Hence, Greek studies were advanced in syllabi to occupy the spaces left by Latin scholarship as its popularity diminished. Within intellectual circles Greek tragedy acquired a new vogue. One zealous scholar even translated John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* into ancient Greek in 1788.¹¹ Over the course of the 1790s the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides gained their greatest prominence yet in the field of Classical studies, and as a Grecian – a member of the highest form at Christ's Hospital – Coleridge undertook particular study of the Greek tragedians. Thomas Moore (1779–1852) became cynical of the fad for Greek drama that arose and continued during his lifetime. In a journal entry of 1819 he complains that some 'ancients' are given 'deference [...] far beyond what they really deserve.' He concludes that 'our admiration, in these cases, is become a sort of religion.'¹²

The increased scholarly attention to Greek tragedy in Britain is largely attributable to Richard Porson (1759–1808), Professor of Greek at Trinity College, Cambridge from 1792 until his death. Mischievously, Coleridge and Southey attribute authorship of their political satire 'The Devil's Thoughts' (first drafted in 1799) to Porson, and throughout his career their victim attracted equal portions of reverence and ridicule. In a lecture of 1894, Ingram Bywater deems Porson

⁹ *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. by Bonamy Dobrée, 6 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1932), III, pp. 1154–5.

¹⁰ Christopher Stray, 'The First Century of the Classical Tripos', in *Classics in Cambridge: Curriculum, Culture and Community*, ed. by Christopher Stray, Supplementary volume xxiv (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), pp. 1–14 (p. 3).

¹¹ George Henry Glasse, *Sampsōn Agōnistēs: Johannis Miltoni Samson Agonistes græco carmine redditus cum versione Latina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1788).

¹² *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, ed. by John Russell (London: Longman, 1860), p. 108.

‘a model of caution and patience’ in his scholarship.¹³ Robert Garland esteems Porson ‘the greatest textual critic working in England at the end of the century.’¹⁴ Byron offers a less flattering depiction of his former professor:

Of all the disgusting brutes—sulky—abusive—and intolerable—Porson was the most bestial as far as the few times that I saw him went [...]. He was tolerated in this state amongst the young men—for his talents—as the Turks think a Madman—inspired—& bear with him.¹⁵

A drunk, Porson was frequently impoverished, but was surrounded by supportive admirers, amongst whom he was venerated particularly for his capability of reciting passages of literature from memory. Hence C.O. Brink makes an assessment that is apt in the context of Coleridge studies, as he laments that Porson’s ‘marvellous promises’ yielded only a ‘small output’ of surviving work: ‘it should be no surprise if we find a certain family-likeness between Porson and the romantic artists of the early nineteenth century.’¹⁶ Although he abandoned work on the texts of Aeschylus for which he was commissioned by Cambridge University Press, Porson earned his reputation primarily by his editions of Euripides’ *Hecuba* (1797), *Orestes* (1798), *Phoenician Women* (1799) and *Medea* (1801). The Aeschylus plays were published posthumously, lacking notes but including more than 50 emendations to the texts, many of which have been retained in today’s editions. Samuel Parr (1747–1825), another prominent scholar of tragedy if not an instructor of Coleridge, is reported to have subscribed to a prospective volume of Coleridge’s imitations from Latin poets in 1794.¹⁷ Other accomplished Classicists in Coleridge’s various circles included Peter Elmsley (1773–1825), a friend of Southey at Oxford, a regular contributor to the *Edinburgh Review* and editor of several editions of tragedies; William Sotheby (1757–1833), a translator of Euripides, Homer and Virgil; Wordsworth, who made a partial translation of the *Aeneid*; and Thomas De Quincey, whose high ability with ancient Greek matched Coleridge’s.

The dry, critical apparatus in editions of Classical tragedy available to Coleridge were concerned almost exclusively with the technicalities of metre, dialect and establishing the authenticity of certain passages. How Greek tragedies were staged was subject to speculation. One recurrent topic of debate, for example, was whether or not Aeschylus had 50 Erinyes pursuing Orestes across the stage during

¹³ Ingram Bywater, *Four Centuries of Greek Learning in England: Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on March 8, 1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), p. 17.

¹⁴ Robert Garland, *Surviving Greek Tragedy* (London: Duckworth Academic and Bristol Classical Press, 2004), p. 125.

¹⁵ *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1973–81), VI (1976), p. 12.

¹⁶ C.O. Brink, *English Classical Scholarship: Historical Reflections on Bentley, Porson and Housman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 108.

¹⁷ *CL*, I, p. 101.

the *Eumenides*.¹⁸ The standard critical tool for studying the structure and effect of tragedies was Aristotle's *Poetics*. This applied to new plays as well as old. For example, Samuel Argent Bardsley assesses *Pizarro* – the adaptation from August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue (1761–1819) that was the most successful of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's tragedies – as part of an ongoing debate amongst intellectuals on whether the attention to the tragedy was deserved. Evidently, this matter was to be determined by the extent of the play's adherence to principles described by Aristotle.¹⁹ Coleridge's opinion of Aristotle is mixed. In critical lectures he scorns those who esteem Aristotle as an 'infallible dictator', and is particularly scathing towards predecessors who have made clichéd, patronizing and sometimes dismissive arguments about Shakespeare as an uncultured 'child of nature' because his plays do not conform to the 'rules' of *Poetics*.²⁰ Most culpable of these forebears is Samuel Johnson, who determines the acceptability of a tragedy solely by the extent of its accordance with Aristotelian principles of tragedy. Typically of his inaccurate and unfair representations of Johnson – which are possibly attempts to dismiss a marketplace competitor as a commentator on drama – Coleridge terms this practice a 'vile Johnsonian Antithesis of Black and White.'²¹ Yet Coleridge himself refers to Aristotle's principles repeatedly in his lectures as demarcations of dramatic norms. He returns to the matter of unity of place and time in every course that discusses tragedy. Overall, Coleridge's use of Aristotle – either when he accepts or rejects principles delineated in *Poetics* – betrays an erroneous assumption about the text that was prevalent in his age. Critics of the time often supposed that Aristotle insisted on how a tragedy *should* be written, while in actuality *Poetics* consists of observations of commonalities between a particular few tragedies that Aristotle revered. The persistence of this mistake in the Romantic period leads me to suspect that Aristotle's doctrine was cited more often than it was read in the original text.

Themes and characters were relatively minor concerns in studies of the Greek plays. In response to the editions of tragedy familiar to him Coleridge would eventually comment that the verse of 'The Devil's Thoughts' amounted to 'almost a libel on the name of Porson, the *tersest* of writers'.²² If such scholarship seems unpalatable material by modern standards, it had many supportive exponents. For example an anonymous writer for *The Eclectic Review* makes a lengthy and impassioned defence of fastidious annotation:

¹⁸ Thomas Webb, *Elements of Greek Prosody and Metre, compiled from the Best Authorities, Ancient and Modern* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1819), p. 79.

¹⁹ Samuel Argent Bardsley, *Critical Remarks on Pizarro: A Tragedy, taken from the German Drama of Kotzebue, and Adapted to the English Stage by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, with Incidental Observations on the Subject of the Drama* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800).

²⁰ *LoL*, I, pp. 78–9.

²¹ *CN*, III, § 3952.

²² *CL*, VI, p. 830.

In the conceptions of the uninformed and the inconsiderate, Verbal Criticism is an occupation fit only for the most dull and plodding intellects,—an anxious solicitude about letters and syllables, inflections and quantities, a tiresome endeavour to adjust the claims of minute variations, as useless in the result as it is perplexing in the toil. Little do they think what a universality and copiousness of knowledge, and what a philosophic habit of mind, are the indispensable prerequisites of critical eminence. Little are they aware, that the theory of language as the index of mind, the faith of history, the native forms of genius in eloquence and poetry, and even the INSPIRED RECORDS of heavenly truth, cannot be accurately brought to conception, without the aid of that poring, patient, close-eyed criticism which they despise.²³

Coleridge demonstrates the dominance of this approach in a notebook entry in which he speculates ‘how little instructive any criticism can be which does not enter into minutiae’.²⁴ When he comments on William Sotheby’s *Orestes*, from Euripides, Coleridge examines the text with terms such as ‘correctness’ and ‘appropriateness’, and he questions the ‘authority’ with which Sotheby draws out or interprets Euripides’ original language. All of these criteria are reminiscent of the discursive method imparted to grammar-school students in their textbooks of Classical tragedy.²⁵ Of further significance in Coleridge’s education is that by reading the meticulous commentary of textual editors, and then undertaking exercises of imitative composition, the acts of poetic creation and critical assessment were closely linked. Yet overall Coleridge is ambivalent about such meticulous attention to textual minutiae. He complains in a marginal note on Joseph Rann’s edition of Shakespeare, for example, that little of the true intention is conveyed by the explanatory notes:

This Edition, and half a score others of this, & other great Poets, by their own Countrymen, furnish by their notes & explanations a good ground of analogy for the faith, we ought to *pin upon* the old Scholiasts of the old Greek Poets. Ex. gr./p.5. ‘wield the matter’—vide note—‘*describe, express.*’ What a fine notion a foreigner would gather of the meaning of the plain English word, ‘wield’, from this gloss!!—And how unfathomably *bathetic* the Line of the Poet would become!!²⁶

Despite the nominal presence of an authority on Greek drama at Cambridge, Coleridge received little formal instruction on tragedy at university. Mathematics dominated the undergraduate curriculum, and Classics would not regain status as a degree subject at Cambridge until the introduction of the Classical Tripos in 1822, the result of a campaign led by Christopher Wordsworth.²⁷ Coleridge’s sole

²³ *The Eclectic Review*, 4:8 (1815), p. 356.

²⁴ *CN*, III, § 3970.

²⁵ *SWF*, pp. 114–20.

²⁶ *CM*, V, p. 768.

²⁷ ‘The First Century of the Classical Tripos’, p. 2.

meaningful interaction with Cambridge's most eminent expert occurred when Porson shortlisted him for a scholarship in 1792, then awarded the prize to another candidate. Furthermore, a sense emerges that schoolteachers were usually more competent scholars, or were more dedicated to their duties, than the professors at Oxford and Cambridge.²⁸ In effect, following his departure from Christ's Hospital and the tuition of James Boyer, Coleridge's engagement with tragedy was entirely self-determined. It was thus in private reading, on his rudderless trajectory through Cambridge, that Coleridge discovered contemporary German tragedy.

In 1794 a friend loaned Coleridge a copy of Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* (1782) as translated by Alexander Fraser Tytler. Shocked by the brutality of Karl Moor and his men, Coleridge tells Southey of his need to cease reading:

Who is this Schiller? This Convulser of the Heart? Did he write his Tragedy amid the yelling of Fiends?—I should not like to [be] able to describe such Characters—I tremble like an Aspen Leaf—Upon my Soul, I write to you because I am frightened [...]. Why have we ever called Milton sublime? That Count de Moor—horrible Wielder of heart-withering Virtues—! Satan is scarcely qualified to attend his Execution as Gallows Chaplain.²⁹

In this response to *The Robbers*, it is peculiar that Coleridge fixates upon the sort of man he imagines the playwright to be rather than tragedy itself, as he does again in a sonnet on Schiller:

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
 Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood
 Wand'ring at eve with finely frenzied eye
 Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
 Awhile with mute awe gazing I would brood,
 Then weep aloud in a wild extacy!
 ('To the Author of "The Robbers"', ll. 9–14)

Michael John Kooy observes Coleridge's interest in Schiller as a participator in sublime experience rather than a detached author of it, yet Coleridge knew very little of Schiller to substantiate such a perception of the man. Thus the sonnet portrays Coleridge's conception of the ideal tragedian in Schiller's name rather than Schiller himself.³⁰ Coleridge's fascination with Schiller as a man must have been piqued by Tytler's introductory 'Advertisement'. Tytler depicts Schiller as a young genius, a subversive political protestor facing the wrath of local government: 'At the age of twenty-three, he wrote this piece, which procured him the highest reputation over all Germany; but the rigour of that institution, to whose discipline

²⁸ For the quality of Classical scholarship in Coleridge's lifetime see M.L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England 1700–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945).

²⁹ *CL*, I, p. 122.

³⁰ Michael John Kooy, *Coleridge, Schiller, and Aesthetic Education* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 25.

he was then subjected, being adverse to such pursuits, he was prohibited the use of his pen, under pain of imprisonment.³¹

No other living dramatist of the period seems to have captured Coleridge's imagination in the manner that Schiller did in 1794. Clearly the German author provided a model for Coleridge to produce a better attempt at a tragedy than *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794). Hence *Osorio* (1797) – like Wordsworth's contemporaneous tragedy *The Borderers* – is markedly indebted to *The Robbers* in its Gothic tropes and political subtexts. As Joyce Crick explains, Schiller exerted a very different literary influence when Coleridge translated from the *Wallenstein* plays in 1800. While *The Robbers* is an early work typical of the fleeting cultural moment termed *Sturm und Drang*, the *Wallenstein* plays reflect Schiller's mature interrogation of Shakespearean tragedy and commitment to the emergence of a national German literature.³² When Coleridge set to work as translator of Schiller with dictionary in hand, he paid the same meticulous attention to the German tragedy with which he had approached the Greek dramatists as a schoolboy.

In 1796 Coleridge associates his decision to learn German with Schiller explicitly:

I am studying German, & in about six weeks shall be able to read that language with tolerable fluency. Now I have some thoughts of making a proposal to Robinson, the great London Bookseller, of translating all the works [of] Schiller, which would make a portly Quarto, on the conditions that he should pay my Journey & wife's to & from Jena, a cheap German University where Schiller resides—and allow me two guineas each Quarto Sheet—which would maintain me.³³

Coleridge's growing interest in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), like that in Schiller, was dualistic. Textual resonances from Lessing's plays occur in Coleridge's works, most notably in the sympathetic treatment of Muslims as opposed to the Christians of *Osorio*, which is indebted to *Nathan the Wise* (1779). But Coleridge has a greater fascination with Lessing as a role model. Stephen Prickett argues that even when Coleridge loses interest in Lessing's thought, which Prickett attributes to Coleridge's abandonment of Unitarianism, Lessing retains importance for 'the way in which Lessing had managed to combine poetic, philosophic and theological concerns into a single career.'³⁴ A projected biography

³¹ Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers: A Tragedy*, trans. by Alexander Fraser Tytler (London: G.J.J. & J. Robinson, 1792), p. v.

³² Joyce Crick, 'Something on William Shakespeare occasioned by *Wallenstein*', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 29 (2007), 31–42 (p. 32).

³³ *CL*, I, p. 209.

³⁴ Stephen Prickett, 'Coleridge, Schlegel, and Schleiermacher: England, Germany (and Australia) in 1798', in *1798: The Year of the 'Lyrical Ballads'*, ed. by Richard Cronin, *Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 170–84 (p. 173).

of Lessing became another reason for Coleridge to travel to Germany. The visit did not progress in the manner Coleridge predicted. He completed neither a translation of Schiller's works nor a biography of Lessing. However, his first encounter with Schiller's work led Coleridge to choose a course of study that would make him a translator of German tragedy and a student of the German literary criticism that would shape his own lectures. Furthermore, it was during his time in Germany that Coleridge studied under one of the greatest Classicists of his time, Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), Professor of Poetry and Eloquence at the University of Göttingen.

Coleridge first arrived at Göttingen in February 1799 and left that June. Scholars have tended to focus on Coleridge's studies under the theologian Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827) and the physician and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), sidelining Heyne as an agreeable librarian who facilitated Coleridge's book requests for the duration of his stay. True enough, Coleridge describes Heyne as 'the Head-Librarian at Gottingen', but he adds that the professor is 'in truth, the real *Governor* of Gottingen'. Coleridge does not seem awestruck by a thinker he describes as 'a little, hopping, over-civil, sort of a Thing who talks very fast & with fragments of coughing between every ten words', but he attended Heyne's seminars, which included studies of Classical tragedy and occasionally plays by more recent German dramatists such as Lessing.³⁵ The scholarship required of participants in Heyne's *Seminarum Philologicum* was strenuous, and composition and debate on Classical texts was conducted in Latin.³⁶

Heyne's lasting, published scholarship consists of his editions of Virgil (1767–75), Pindar (1773) and Homer (1802–03). It is regrettable that his thoughts on tragedy have not been recorded thoroughly, particularly as I feel that they have important relevance to some of the charges of plagiarism made against Coleridge. Another of Heyne's pupils was August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845). Few critics have explored this commonality. In an old article A.C. Dunstan observes that the origin of sacrifice that Coleridge posits in his lectures – in which 'the heroes of old under the influence of [...] Bacchic enthusiasm performed more than human actions' – has a parallel in Schlegel's lectures, but that both passages originate in Heyne's *Vorlesungen*.³⁷ Hence there may be truth in Coleridge's famous defensive claim that he had not read Schlegel's published lectures prior to the similar sentiments he delivered in his own course of 1812. The scholars may have been mutually indebted either to Heyne directly, or to ideas that commonly emerged in discussions at Göttingen and were not strictly the intellectual property of any single participant.³⁸

³⁵ *CL*, I, pp. 472, 475.

³⁶ *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, ed. by Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), pp. 170–82.

³⁷ A.C. Dunstan, 'The German Influence on Coleridge', *The Modern Language Review*, 18:2 (1923), 183–201 (p. 195).

³⁸ *CM*, V, pp. 836–7.

The description of Heyne's seminar offered by Ulrich Schindel is indicative of a new mode of analysing Classics in Germany in which tragedy was prominent. Unlike his English contemporaries, Heyne would regularly reach a stage in each class at which he would call an end to evaluation of metre and diction: "Nun kömmt der Tichter" ("now comes the poet") was his constant remark when he felt that he had sufficiently clarified the verbal meaning and the factual data and set himself to fathoming the venustates of the text and their causae.³⁹ Heyne's profound reading of drama indicates the advent of tragedy as a philosophical mode rather than solely a literary form. Another of the key thinkers in this development was Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), a major influence on Coleridge, who established the philosophical possibilities of the tragic in his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795). In Coleridge's thought, Schelling provides a bridge between tragedy and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Schelling avails himself of Kant's renewal of interest in the sublime, and posits that the aesthetic experience Kant promotes in nature can likewise be found in tragedy as the highest form of art. Thus Dennis J. Schmidt concludes that the elevation of tragedy to high philosophy, led by Schelling, is essentially facilitated by Kant, although this requires the catachresis of transferring Kant's principles from the natural to the artistic realm.⁴⁰ I have indicated that Coleridge's sense of the potential for tragic experience to benefit its audience is Schillerian. My broader point – discussed in subsequent chapters in terms of Coleridge's debts to individual authors – is that his use of tragedy as a tool to address philosophical matters follows a trend that is new to his time and German in origin. Hence the subjects that Coleridge engages with using tragic thought, either critically or in poetical works, are often those that preoccupy his German influences too. These include the nature and purposes of suffering, the possibility of human freedom, the expression of the tragic in non-dramatic forms and the literary fragment.

Finally I acknowledge Coleridge's English influences, a vast subject that is well covered by modern scholars, but particular aspects of which I want to accentuate here. Charles Mahoney has recently reassessed Coleridge's critical interest in the nature of Shakespeare's genius and the psychology of his characters.⁴¹ In effect Shakespeare provides Coleridge with two of his career paths: in many of his critical lectures Coleridge adopts Shakespeare as his primary subject. Secondly, when composing his own tragedies, it is notable how literal-minded Coleridge is in emulation of Shakespeare's example. While *Osorio* is tangibly infused with Schillerian dissent, its expression, as Jonathan Bate notes, is blank verse that is cobbled together from Shakespeare's plays that 'apes the language and rhythms of

³⁹ *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 73.

⁴¹ Charles Mahoney, 'Coleridge and Shakespeare', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, pp. 498–514.

Shakespeare without making each speech part of a unified linguistic pattern'. The preface to *Zapolya* is candid in its admission of 'humble imitation' of Shakespeare. Bate suggests that Coleridge's inability to match Shakespeare's writing eventually brings about his decline in poetical output and increased critical prowess. Bate makes a credible point here, although I suggest different reasons for the transition in my final chapter.⁴² Related to the spell cast over Coleridge by Shakespeare is his frequent citation, by contrast, of plays by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, upheld by Coleridge as paradigms of how tragedy should *not* be written. To the text of *The Prophetess: or, The History of Dioclesian* Coleridge appends this note: 'No man can have formed a just idea of possible *tragic* Drama [...] & not find in this Trag[edy] of Valent[ian] a convincing proof, that the Writer, was utterly incapable of Tragedy.'⁴³ The inverted influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Coleridge parallels that of Koetzebue, whose work dominated the British stage because translated plays from Europe were more cheaply available than original works in English. Hence Koetzebue is repeatedly a target of abuse for Coleridge, who complains that 'Koetzebue is the German B. & F., without their poetic powers', with the reservation that his sense of tragedy 'was too low for the age, & too unpoetic for the genius, of Beaumont & Fletcher.'⁴⁴

The importance of John Milton to Coleridge is well-documented by contemporaries in addition to modern critics. In a review of an 1813 lecture, a journalist for the *Bristol Gazette* gratifies the affinity Coleridge wishes to establish in his imitative poetry:

Were Milton to return among the living, and to select from our poets him, who from profoundness of thought and unworldly abstraction of feeling, joined to the prodigality of fancy in glowing conceptions the nearest resembled himself, he would probably fix his choice on the author of 'The Nightingale' and 'Fears in Solitude'.⁴⁵

In *Table Talk* Coleridge indicates the different model of authorship offered by Milton as opposed to Shakespeare: 'Shakespeare's character is characterless; that is, does not reflect the individual Shakespeare; but John Milton is in every line of the *Paradise Lost*.'⁴⁶ While the reception and reinvention of *Paradise Lost* is ably assessed in Lucy Newlyn's *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (1993), Jonathon Shears builds upon Newlyn's work in his recent study of how Romantic authors misread Milton, particularly in Coleridge 'trying to empty out the theology from the poetry' in lectures, with the consequence that 'the feature of *Paradise*

⁴² Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 53, 69–70.

⁴³ *CM*, I, p. 367.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

⁴⁵ *LoL*, I, p. 489.

⁴⁶ *TT*, I, p. 125. Coleridge confuses this point by claiming that Milton also 'stands *ab extra*'.

Lost to suffer in his appraisal is the story'.⁴⁷ In short Coleridge takes what he wants from Milton, and I am indebted to the more recent scholars who have informed this sense, departing from Harold Bloom's older depiction of Coleridge in awe of Milton's ability. I find Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' a suspect theory for its inapplicability to any author with more than one role-model. Nor am I convinced by Bloom's depiction of Coleridge in an Oedipal Freudian battle with Milton, with whom he is allegedly in thrall and competition simultaneously.⁴⁸ While Coleridge's tragic sense is heavily indebted to *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes* also has a salient presence in Coleridge's works. In particular, as I discuss subsequently, Coleridge invokes *Samson Agonistes* when he wishes his audience to interpret events of political upheaval as tragic by contextualizing current events in the world of Milton's play.

Wordsworth is the last of Coleridge's English influences I wish to mention here, and I acknowledge his roles as literary figure, collaborator and supportive friend. Wordsworth does not share Coleridge's tragic vision, which I find to be an alternative to the Wordsworthian sublime. Wordsworth transcends suffering in encounters with the Old Cumberland Beggar (1800) and the leech-gatherer (1798). He achieves philosophical elevation by overcoming circumstance in recognition of the universality of experience. By contrast, Coleridge engages with suffering directly in search of redemption. This difference is clearer when the two writers treat the same subject, such as their accounts of the scandal at Buttermere, which I discuss in Chapter 3. Nonetheless Wordsworth encouraged Coleridge's explorations of the tragic. *Osorio* was inspired by Wordsworth's draft of *The Borderers* (1796–97). When both plays were rejected, Coleridge resumed his exploration of tragic themes in various verse forms in the collaboration of *Lyrical Ballads*. Where he claims that readers of *Lyrical Ballads* 'should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents' in his Advertisement of 1798, Wordsworth demonstrates his provision of an alternative to the Classical knowledge and rigid Miltonisms evident in Coleridge's early work. Thus Wordsworth influences Coleridge's experimentation with contemporary and more accessible expressions of the tragic. The Wordsworths accompanied Coleridge to Germany initially, and Wordsworth's work continued to provide stimulation for Coleridge's critical thought on how poetry should address the pathetic. The extent to which they desire to approach the misery caused by catastrophe differentiates the two authors, and in transcending it in most of his works Wordsworth is fairly termed an 'anti-tragic idealist' by Terry Eagleton.⁴⁹ In Coleridge's thought I argue that explorations of violence, strife and anguish are essential to his sacrificial philosophy; hence it is moments of catastrophe in his works that I wish to examine initially.

⁴⁷ Jonathon Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of 'Paradise Lost': Reading Against the Grain*, The Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p. 100.

⁴⁸ Harold Bloom, 'Coleridge: The Anxiety of Influence', *Diacritics*, 2:1 (1972), 36–41.

⁴⁹ *Sweet Violence*, p. 24.

Chapter 2

Hamartia and Suffering in the Poetical Works

Amid the many and conflicting scholarly classifications of what is considered ‘tragic’, anguish and physical torment are universally acknowledged as essential characteristics. For example, Raymond Williams claims that the reader or spectator’s response to suffering defines what is tragic in life and in art: ‘Where the suffering is felt, where it is taken into the person of another, we are clearly within the possible dimensions of the tragic.’ To qualify these ‘possible dimensions’ Williams excludes accident, illness and misfortune from traditional conceptions of tragedy. This too is a commonplace criterion to delineate the events that constitute the tragic, which must possess a certain magnitude.¹

Tragic suffering follows catastrophe, which occurs as a consequence of the tragic protagonist’s *hamartia*. In Classical tragedy, *hamartia* refers to the ‘error’ committed by a character, such as Orestes’ murder of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus’ play *The Libation Bearers*, the theft of fire in *Prometheus Bound*, and Creon’s edict which forbids the burial of Polyneices in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. In the subsequent English literary tradition *hamartia* has been understood as a character’s inherent ‘tragic flaw’, such as the ambition of Macbeth, the pride of Milton’s Satan and the obsession of Herman Melville’s Captain Ahab. Despite the interpretative shift from ‘error’ to ‘flaw’, it is common to both conceptions of *hamartia* that torment results from transgressive action.

Transgression and suffering are recurrent themes in Coleridge’s poetical works and are almost always associated with the supernatural. The worlds of Cain, the Ancient Mariner, Christabel and Osorio/Ordonio are inhabited by a variety of spirits, sorcerers and apparitions. Even where Coleridge writes of real-life catastrophes, as I discuss in the next chapter, he tends to introduce an unworldly aspect to account for events. Coleridge’s use of the supernatural has been problematic for critics unable to identify coherent morality in his works. For example, Leslie Stephens’s criticism of ‘The Ancient Mariner’ is well known in studies of Coleridge: ‘the moral, which would apparently be that people who sympathize with a man who shoots an albatross will die in prolonged torture of thirst, is open to serious objections.’² Stephens’s dry wit does not compromise the sincerity of his ‘serious objections’, which are just. If the sailors’ death penalty is

¹ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 2nd edn, rev. (London: Verso Editions, 1979), pp. 47–9.

² Leslie Stephens, *Hours in a Library*, 2nd edn, rev., 3 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1892), I, p. 359.

due to their approval of the Mariner, whom they believe shot the bird that brought 'fog and mist', the punishment seems greatly disproportionate to the crime ('The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', l. 100).³ Seamus Perry finds Stephens's comment 'unanswerable', and complains that 'the attempt to find in the poem a redemptive allegory finds itself oddly frustrated.'⁴

The difficulty for Coleridge's reader in attempting a moral interpretation is reasonable, not solely in the case of the 'Ancient Mariner', but in other of Coleridge's works. Robespierre, a potential benefactor of mankind in the author's view, is executed to no obvious benefit of society; Osorio/Ordonio cannot have the atonement for which he pleads; Cain suffers apparently for no productive purpose; the intentions of Geraldine are unclear in Christabel's ordeal; the jealous mother in 'The Three Graves' curses her daughter, but has no entitlement to vengeful behaviour. I think that the cause of such moral ambiguities is that Coleridge himself does not comprehend agony and misdeeds, and uses the supernatural to investigate them. In this methodology I draw a parallel with Robert Burton, whose *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in part a catalogue of unworldly beings, inspired Coleridge. Burton explains his decision to consult as many diverse theories as possible in his attempt to understand melancholy: 'I will adventure through the midst of these perplexities, and led on by the clue or thread of our best Writers, extricate myself out of a Labyrinth of doubts and error.'⁵

The central point of this chapter is that Coleridge is of a mind with readers like Stephens and Perry in his puzzlement at the instances of injustice and suffering he depicts. Hence Coleridge seeks to investigate these themes without necessarily making – or being capable of making – evaluative statements about them. My interpretation is indebted to Anya Taylor, who comments that Part I of 'Christabel' provokes questions to which Coleridge does not seem to know the answers, particularly concerned with will and agency, which occur similarly in 'The Ancient Mariner'.⁶ Taylor proceeds to suggest that, in the case of 'Christabel', Coleridge returns to the themes in Part II with greater assurance of thematic purpose, but I am more interested in his periods of uncertainty. Often where a 'redemptive allegory' is not in evidence, Coleridge's attempt to discern one is, even if his methods can involve circuitous and metaphysical thought. In 1809 Coleridge claims that 'the Poet is not only the man made to solve the riddle of the Universe, but he is also the man who feels where it is not solved and which continually

³ As this version of the marginal gloss is relevant to my argument, all quotations from the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' are from the 1834 text unless otherwise stated. See *PW*, I.1, pp. 371–419.

⁴ Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 283.

⁵ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner et al., 6 vols, rev. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), I, p. 171.

⁶ Anya Taylor, 'Coleridge's "Christabel" and the Phantom Soul', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 42:4 (2002), 707–30 (p. 716).

awakens his feelings being of the same feeling.⁷ He ennoble the author's efforts with a sense of duty. His suggestion that unresolved philosophical questions irritate him explains Coleridge's return to particular themes in his poems and plays. Thus Coleridge strives for an optimistic, teleological view of anguish. Like Burton he uses the supernatural to negotiate 'a Labyrinth of doubt'. To examine Coleridge's preoccupation with the 'riddle' of transgression and torment, I posit that the philosophical ideas he uses in the endeavour to locate his 'redemptive allegory' are derived from his reading of Greek tragedy. Sometimes Coleridge invokes these aspects of tragedy with a literal belief in the spirits that impel the characters of ancient plays. In other instances he is sceptical but uses the concepts as interpretative tools.

The Daemon

Since John Livingston Lowes's *Road to Xanadu* (1927) traced Coleridge's reading on the 'powerful order in the hierarchy of being' in the works of such scholars as Burton and Michael Psellus, the supernatural entity that is the daemon has been a salient concept in studies of Coleridge; so much so that it is incredible to me that no critic has addressed the importance of daemons in Greek tragedy in relation to Coleridge.⁸ After Lowes, critics have interpreted many of the supernatural beings or events in the 'Ancient Mariner' as daemonic. John Beer classifies the Gothic figures of Death and Life-in-Death as 'daemons who dice for the Ancient Mariner'.⁹ Nick Groom claims that 'the fateful Albatross has daemonic qualities'.¹⁰ Additionally, the epigraph added to the 'Ancient Mariner' in 1817, quoted from Thomas Burnet, invites the reader to dwell on the agency of 'Naturas invisibiles', *invisible* beings. Coleridge's gloss, first appearing in the 1817 text, tells of 'the Polar Spirit's fellow-daemons, the invisible inhabitants of the element' (glossing ll. 393–7). Hence, in addition to the gruesome spectres and angelic visions that surround the Mariner and give rise to the poem's celebrated imagery, there are unseen daemonic forces at work in the 'Ancient Mariner' and in many of Coleridge's poems. Frequently, these spirits are responsible for the deeds that cause tragic events to occur.

John Beer's objection to Lowes's study of the daemon must be noted. Beer finds that 'his whole account is touched with ridicule, which takes the form of a patronizing irony'.¹¹ Certainly, Lowes's account is incomplete. As he declares with lofty disdain for metaphysics that his interest lies in the imagery and 'beauty' of the 'Ancient Mariner', the aesthete Lowes implies that he is unconcerned with

⁷ *Friend*, I, p. 125.

⁸ John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, 2nd edn, rev. (Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1930), p. 233.

⁹ John Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), p. 106.

¹⁰ Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 195.

¹¹ *Visionary*, pp. 103–4.

invisible beings. He concludes his study with the opinion that his chapter on daemons has 'probably not enhanced [the poem] one whit for anybody'.¹² When he assesses Coleridge's influence by other authors, Lowes only cites books read by Coleridge from 1796–98. Yet Coleridge had certainly encountered the daemon previously in his study of Classics at school and at Cambridge. Used by Homer as a term meaning an allotter of fate, the daemon was understood in antiquity to be an immortal being and an irresistible force.¹³ Accordingly, Coleridge perceived such ancient divinities as 'the Ministers of irreversible destiny'.¹⁴ Several famous manifestations of daemonic agency are depicted in *King Oedipus* by Sophocles, named by Coleridge as the most influential Greek dramatist of his adult life.¹⁵ As he nears knowledge of his patricide and incest, Oedipus claims that his torment comes from a cruel daemon. Subsequently, a messenger describes the king under the influence of a superhuman force as, screaming and crazed like an animal, he breaks down a door to discover the body of Jocasta, his mother and wife. Finally, the blinded Oedipus emerges, having raked his eyes repeatedly with Jocasta's hair pins. The chorus asks what daemon has compelled the king to commit this self-mutilation. While he acknowledges responsibility for his actions, Oedipus cannot offer a reason.

The daemon possesses Oedipus, and his actions are involuntary. The daemons of Plato's works are also controlling; they guide men to Hades or paradise, determine Socrates' behaviour, and mediate between gods and men.¹⁶ I suggest that the plight of the Mariner – and to an extent Cain – parallels that of Oedipus, as each is compelled to wander, and to derive wisdom from his continuous torment, as a consequence of his crime. However, my emphasis is that Coleridge's various conceptions of the daemon throughout his works resemble those of Sophocles and Plato. When he refers to opium as an 'avenging Daemon', Coleridge postulates a force that enters the body and possesses it.¹⁷ Hence in the Crewe manuscript of 'Kubla Khan' Coleridge depicts the 'Woman wailing for her Dæmon Lover', and so presents the act of procreation, and consequent pregnancy, as invasive and controlling (16). This accentuates a gender dynamic in Coleridge's conception of the daemon by which the spirit is masculine and the person acted upon is feminine. A Sophoclean daemon is evident in *Remorse* when Teresa intimates that 'a dim power drives me hence' (III.ii.110).¹⁸ Alvar's 'imperative Voice within' recalls Socrates' inner voice, which prevents his association with evil men (I.i.72–3). In his version of Schiller's *Piccolomini*, Coleridge inserts his own meditation on the

¹² *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 240.

¹³ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ *LOL*, I, p. 448.

¹⁵ *TT*, I, p. 401.

¹⁶ See, for example, *Apology* 31[c–d], *Theages* 128[d]–130, and *Symposium* 202[e]–3.

¹⁷ *CM*, III, p. 503.

¹⁸ All quotations from *Remorse* refer to the printed version (*PW* III.2, pp. 1237–325) unless otherwise stated, as this includes passages omitted from the staged version. Line references to *Osorio* are provided where equivalent passages occur.

influential activity of daemonic beings. As J.C.C. Mays notes, Coleridge evokes Milton's lost Eden and formulates a Schillerian sense that 'modern rational man has lost the totality and harmony represented by the ancient divinities of the Golden Age, but to celebrate it in poetry, as Max does, is a means of restoring it.'¹⁹ Max speaks of

Spirits or gods, that us'd to share this earth
With man as with their friend; and to the lover
Yonder they move, from yonder visible sky
Shoot influence down. (II.iv.133–6)

In Coleridge's translation of *The Death Of Wallenstein*, Gordon, the Governor of Egra, recalls Wallenstein's daemonic inspiration as a youth. In a note on the manuscript, Coleridge describes this as an 'improved' translation of Schiller's German:

He walk'd amidst us of a silent spirit,
Communing with himself: yet I have known him
Transported on a sudden into utterance
Of strange conceptions; kindling into splendour
His soul reveal'd itself, and he spake so
That we look'd round perplex'd upon each other,
Not knowing whether it were craziness
Or whether 't were a god that spoke in him. (III.ii.103–10)²⁰

Gordon indicates a spiritual change in Wallenstein following his conversion to Catholicism. The Duke's continuous deferral of decision in the play intimates that his protective spirit has abandoned him. This process is opposite to the enlightened Ancient Mariner's departure from Catholicism. The expiation of the Mariner's crime entails a new awareness of and subjection to the numerous spiritual inhabitants of his world.

In the 'Ancient Mariner', the daemonic force can be benign, as in Max Piccolomini's account of 'spirits or gods': the Mariner is moved spontaneously to bless the water snakes 'unaware' (285). Yet spirits also compel impulsive and destructive action like the daemons of Oedipus. The slaying of the albatross is reckless and motiveless, and therefore could be attributed to daemonic possession. Critical interpretations of the shooting often present it as involuntary, and so place the event within Tzvetan Todorov's domain of the fantastic, which allows for the agency of supernatural beings where no rational explanation is evident.²¹ Seamus Perry finds the Mariner to be divided from himself, so that his action is 'non-volitional'.²² Similarly, Lucy Newlyn observes that 'the bareness of the narrative

¹⁹ *PW*, III.1, p. 364n.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 35.

²² *Uses of Division*, p. 283.

suggests an almost fatalistic attitude towards the moment of transgression, as though it were involuntary.²³ As if numbed and detached from the incident, the Mariner offers only a sparse account of what he has done: 'With my cross-bow | I shot the Albatross' (81–2). No better able to explicate the transgressive killing of the bird than the Mariner himself, the interpretative gloss merely laments the Mariner's display of poor hospitality (glossing 79–82). Despite the absence of a motive, the act becomes tragically significant as catastrophe ensues. The shooting apparently causes the deaths of the Mariner's 200 shipmates and the prolonged torment of the speaker. The magnitude of the consequences to an apparently minor incident suggests that some intent lies behind the killing, if not the Mariner's own. The shooting is somehow staged to impart lessons about humanity's place in the hierarchy of the universe. Moreover, the events that follow the death of the albatross exemplify Coleridge's persistent tendency to portray catastrophe as consequential to acts that are unintended by those who perform them.

Commenced shortly after the completion of 1798's 'Ancient Mariner', Part I of 'Christabel' also presents a world governed by spirits. Regardless of whether she is a good spirit sent to test Christabel, an evil spirit tempting her, a vampire or a lamia, it is clear that Geraldine, as John Beer observes, is 'preyed upon' by energy.²⁴ Arthur Nethercot claims that Geraldine may be possessed, and notes that she cannot cross the castle's threshold unassisted, that she cannot pray, and that she sinks before the statue of the angel.²⁵ While exhaustion, rather than possession or vampirism, could account for each of Nethercot's examples, Geraldine's discomfort functions to establish her as a partially sympathetic character, but it is clear that she is subject to supernatural powers. Inadvertently, she invokes the ghost of Christabel's mother, and recalls the appearance of Banquo's spectre in *Macbeth*. When Geraldine dismisses the ghost she displays her authority in the spirit world: 'this Hour is mine—[...] tis given to me' (211, 213). While Geraldine is a 'Worker of [...] Harms' that bring 'Sorrow and Shame', there is evidence that she does not act voluntarily (298, 296). Geraldine's declaration that she 'will *try*' to repay Christabel's assistance with kindness invites doubt that she will be capable of doing so (231, italics added). While unclear of purpose, Geraldine intimates that she follows a plan reluctantly, being 'doleful' as she announces that she will work magic on Christabel (265). Her claim that in her bosom 'there worketh a Spell' indicates Geraldine's passiveness; that she acts under a daemonic influence (267).

In his studies of 'Christabel', Beer observes that Tryermaine's obscured moon, doleful owls and single fluttering leaf 'correspond to the nature of the daemonic force in Geraldine'; they are as equivocal as she is herself.²⁶ Elsewhere, he claims

²³ Lucy Newlyn, *'Paradise Lost' and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 124.

²⁴ John Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 233.

²⁵ Arthur H. Nethercot, *The Road to Tryermaine*, 2nd edn (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1962), pp. 154–6.

²⁶ *Poetic Intelligence*, p. 134.

that Tryermaine's 'World of Death' symbolizes the end of Christabel's innocence (333).²⁷ In the poem's natural environment, Beer adumbrates significance beyond pathetic fallacy. The elements and wildlife of Tryermaine do not merely match the ambiguous tone of 'Christabel', but nature itself seems to give rise to the daemonic power that guides Geraldine. Beer elucidates this idea in an analysis of 'The Raven' (1797). The bird has lost its young and its nest so that a ship might be constructed, and is joyful as it witnesses the destruction of the vessel and the death of her crew in a tempest. Triumphantly, the raven circles in the storm, and Beer observes it to be as 'an energy expressing itself'; the storm's power is likewise the bird's.²⁸ In the destructive power of the tempest, daemonic energy is a manifestation of nature itself – rather than a chance, wandering spirit – which conspires to sink the ship.

I find that the tempestuous and diversely inhabited universe of the 'Ancient Mariner' is akin to that of 'The Raven'. The daemonic agent which directs the Mariner's shooting of the albatross is a manifestation of the poem's elemental forces; its energy is that of the 'tyrannous and strong' storm that precedes the bird's arrival and pursues the ship with destructive intent (42, 45–50). The Mariner's crime is predetermined in and by the world of the poem. Like Oedipus he is 'oppressed by fate' and its daemons.²⁹ Such involuntary action recurs in Coleridge's dramas and criticism. Osorio/Ordonio casts himself as a victim with claims that his transgressions have been fated: 'What have I done but that which nature destin'd, | Or the blind elements stirr'd up within me?' (*Osorio*, II.i.114–5; *Remorse*, II.i.131–2). The 'blind elements' evoke a primordial power of unknown or unknowable purpose that is mysterious, and terrifies even the villain.

Although Shelley's conception of the daemon is very different from Coleridge's, I borrow Richard Holmes's apt phrase from his discussion of Shelley's response to Plato's *Symposium*, that belief in daemons 'had always hovered uneasily in his mind between gothic metaphor and psychological reality.'³⁰ Similarly, Coleridge's interest wavers back and forth between literal belief and metaphorical applications. In contributions to Southey's *Joan of Arc* composed in 1795, Coleridge makes a literal-minded speculation on the existence of daemonic spirits, grounded in Sir Isaac Newton's hypothesis of a cosmological ether affecting all bodies, but more greatly indebted, as George S. Erving argues, to a Priestleyan belief in a supernatural order.³¹ Thus Coleridge attempts to blend respected scientific speculation with superstition:

²⁷ *Visionary*, p. 186.

²⁸ *Poetic Intelligence*, p. 108.

²⁹ *LoL*, I, p. 317.

³⁰ Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974; repr Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 437.

³¹ George S. Erving, 'The Politics of Matter: Newtonian Science and Priestleyan Metaphysics in Coleridge's "Preternatural Agency"', *European Romantic Review*, 19:3 (2008), 219–32 (p. 228).

I deem no nobler province they possess
 Than by disposal of apt circumstance
 To rear some realm with patient discipline,
 [...]

Thus they make
 Of transient Evil ever—during Good.
 ('Contributions to "Joan of Arc"', ll. II.121–7)

In 1818 Coleridge retains sufficient interest in spirits to attack Richard Gibbons, who doubts Socrates' sincerity when he testifies to the existence of daemons.³² As late as 1831, Coleridge still finds daemonology a potent metaphor, and complains that Britain's timid foreign policy 'will be the punishing Daemon of Civilized Europe'.³³ While compulsive action is an interest evident in many of Coleridge's works, it is most salient in his earlier compositions, which were created during periods at which Coleridge was likely to hold more literal beliefs in the existence of destructive spirits of nature. One such example is *The Fall of Robespierre*, in which the agency of daemonic influence is conceived in relation to one of Coleridge's contemporary psychological interests, the theory of animal magnetism.

In the first act of *The Fall of Robespierre*, Coleridge makes his most sustained examination of the invasive energies that result in bloodshed and misery. Coleridge's attitude to the man held responsible for the French Terror is conspicuously sympathetic. The play's dedication depicts the deceased politician as if his deeds should be evaluated separately from his personality: 'a man, whose great bad actions have cast a disastrous lustre on his name'. The '*disastrous* lustre' is made to seem more regrettable than the merely '*bad* actions' (my italics). In a lecture from 1795, the year following Robespierre's execution and the composition of the play, Coleridge claims that 'it is not the character of the possessor which directs the power, but the power which shapes and directs the character of the possessor'.³⁴ 'Power' refers primarily to political influence, but is also understood as an invasive energy or a force. Because of the uncontrollable nature of this power, the assignment of responsibility for actions is problematic in *The Fall of Robespierre*. William Jewett finds in Barrere's opening lines that an 'internal anxiety about one's own power is projected onto another': the characters distance political power from themselves, and thus abnegate their part in the atrocities consequential to that power.³⁵ Barrere's speech expresses a dread of something spiritual in Robespierre that eludes specific language: 'I fear the Tyrant's *soul*— | Sudden in action, fertile in resource' (I.3–4). When Tallien remarks that 'e'en our dreams | Threaten the assassin hand of Robespierre', he implies dedication to his ambition, but also that the actions of the Thermidorians are not fully conscious (I.240–41).

³² *Lects 1818–19*, I, p. 144.

³³ *CN*, V, § 6599.

³⁴ *Lects 1795*, p. 35.

³⁵ William Jewett, 'The Fall of Robespierre and the Sublime Machine of Agency', *ELH*, 63:2 (1996), 423–52 (p. 432).

As in the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel', the daemonic forces that motivate *Robespierre's* politicians are akin to the elemental conditions. Thus Coleridge creates the sense of a charged political climate in which the characters compulsively commit acts of violence. Barrere remarks that 'the tempest gathers' as Robespierre's opponents conspire against him, and St Just finds that Legendre's temper is of a kind with 'the jar | Of elements' in Paris (I.1, I.83–4). Robespierre likens the temporary suppression of his enemies to 'the short-lived slumber of the tempest' (I.137). The citizens of Paris are also subject to the reckless energy that drives the politicians to atrocities without acknowledging their actions, to the extent that they disregard their own welfare. Tallien comments that the masses are 'wild of head to work their own destruction' (I.37). This allusion to the French people's crazed diffusion of responsibility indicates Coleridge's fascination with mesmerism or animal magnetism. Mesmer's hypothesis of a superfine fluid which penetrates and covers all bodies, and his related practises of hypnotism, were sufficiently vague to accommodate mysticism and the occult. Famously, Edmund Burke alludes to electricity and magnetism in relation to the contagious excitation of the French people 'growing wild from the rank productive force of the human mind'.³⁶ Moreover, the theory of a fluid with a mysterious power over people is remarkably similar to the notion of 'influence' from the stars, which is a prevalent supposition in Elizabethan tragedy. While mesmerism would suggest that a group's violence could be attributed to a hypnotic connection, it would also be compatible, in Coleridge's thought, with the concept of a daemonic impulse effecting the actions of those within that connection, so that many might serve its intent. Coleridge makes this connection between the daemon and mesmerism explicit in his marginalia.³⁷

With animal magnetism the daemonic acquires political resonance by the commonality of Coleridge's interest with French revolutionaries. Franz Anton Mesmer's repeated snubs from the French academies prior to the Revolution ensured his popularity with such anti-establishment figures as Jacques-Pierre Brissot and the Marquis de La Fayette. Robert Darnton believes that Brissot in particular was attracted to mesmerism because 'it seemed to offer a new scientific explanation for the invisible forces of nature.'³⁸ That all bodies could be subject to the same forces offered an egalitarian alternative to the long-held beliefs in Aristotelian essentialism, which implied that beings were self-determining and corroborated the elitism of the *ancien régime*. Animal magnetism also generated controversy in Britain, as Tim Fulford documents in an account of the most notorious domestic practitioner, the man-midwife J.B. De Mainauduc, and the

³⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London relative to that Event. In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*, 3rd edn (London: Dodsley, 1790), p. 234.

³⁷ *CM*, V, p. 723.

³⁸ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 83.

theory of James Tilly Matthews that William Pitt was under the magnetic control of Jacobins who sought to destroy the country.³⁹

Coleridge retains an interest in involuntary crime throughout his works. The professedly helpless transgressor Osorio/Ordonio resembles *Othello's* Iago as Coleridge analyses Shakespeare's villain in 1818. Iago is unable to determine the cause of his evil. He offers several reasons for his actions – failure to win promotion, a suspicion that Emilia adulterates with Othello, and then Cassio – and forgets each supposed motive as he latches onto the next. In a play in which the agency of evil has a significant influence on Coleridge's own works, Iago is prey to an uncontrollable hatred that compels him to invent provocations to justify his emotions. Hence, Coleridge explains that the viewer or the critic's task is the 'motive hunting of motiveless Malignity'. Analysis of the character requires an attempt to find reason in Iago's erratic hatred. In a lecture of 1819, Coleridge speaks of Iago's assumption of feelings 'alien from his own' which are 'made to act upon him'. Coleridge finds that Iago does not wish to be an 'absolute fiend', and that he truly wishes to be 'honest Iago', but is incapable of acting honestly.⁴⁰ M.M. Badawi finds in Coleridge's analysis of the play that 'Iago's evil acquires superhuman dimensions'.⁴¹ Elinor Shaffer explores the interiority of Coleridge's Iago, in whom is manifested an evil that transcends himself: 'he who most relies on his self-will has no will, but is the myriad reflection of a chaotic world. This is the inward form of tragedy.'⁴² Coleridge's interpretation seems either strikingly tolerant or psychologically profound when contrasted, for example, with the view of William Hazlitt, who finds Iago to be simply 'a gay, light-hearted monster, a careless, cordial, comfortable villain'.⁴³

Daemonology appeals to Coleridge for its compatibility with – or applicability to – certain of his philosophical interests, such as evil and responsibility for crimes. The daemonic is an important device in Coleridge's works because it allows displacement of responsibility for a person's actions. I think that Coleridge never manages to account for evil in his philosophy: he wants to be able to understand it and explain its origin, but fails to. In his plans to establish the American community of Pantisocracy in 1794, Coleridge seeks to evade the problem 'by removing all Motives to Evil'.⁴⁴ In a letter from 1795 he documents frustration and failure in his meditations upon evil. Depressed by the topic, Coleridge has relinquished it, and conceals his anxiety at the impasse with the weak sentiment that it is better to

³⁹ Tim Fulford, 'Conducting the Vital Fluid: The Politics and Poetics of Mesmerism in the 1790s', *Studies in Romanticism*, 43 (2004), 57–78.

⁴⁰ *LoL*, I, pp. 314–9.

⁴¹ M.M. Badawi, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 140.

⁴² Elinor Shaffer, 'Iago's Malignity Motivated: Coleridge's Unpublished "Opus Maximum"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 19:3 (1968), 195–203 (p. 200).

⁴³ *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), III: *A View of the Stage*, p. 20.

⁴⁴ *CL*, I, p. 114.

think of cheerier subjects: 'Almost all the physical Evil in the World depends on the existence of moral Evil—and the long-continued contemplation of the latter does not tend to meliorate the human heart.'⁴⁵ In a journal entry of 1800 Coleridge includes the reminder, 'N.B. to try understand Villains'.⁴⁶ Later in life, Coleridge still intimates a perceived obligation to comprehend the theme of evil: 'the result of my system', he declares in *Table Talk*, 'will be to show that so far from the World being a Goddess in petticoats, it is rather the Devil in a straight waistcoat.'⁴⁷ The failure of this system to appear indicates Coleridge's prolonged inability to account for evil.

Adopting the philosophy of Greek tragedy assists Coleridge with the problem of evil because evil *per se* does not exist in that context: characters are manoeuvred into certain situations and actions. It is not the fault of Eteocles, in *Seven Against Thebes*, that he must face his brother in combat. The conflict of *Antigone* arises from the validity of each party's obligation: the eponym defies her ruler because of religious and familial duty, while Creon must uphold civic decree. Even Medea, who murders her children, is not held to account for her crimes. The divine machine that rescues her indicates an other-worldly tolerance of her actions. The attribution of actions to daemons, the mysterious agents of godly intentions, evades such questions as unfathomable malevolence. Hence in a letter to Josiah Wedgwood of 1798, Coleridge speaks of 'a man acting [...] in opposition to his principles', he assigns responsibility for action to circumstance, which remains vague and not a human product. Thus Coleridge recommends 'Removal' of oneself from particular environments as a preventative measure against bad acts.⁴⁸ With this he absolves a person of blame for crimes even if (s)he allows himself to be exposed to such dangers. Thus daemonology is an attractive perspective for Coleridge for its solution to (or evasion of) the problem of evil, in addition to its compatibility with the philosophies of immanence that interest him.

When he depicts evil acts as compulsive Coleridge hints at a doctrine of Necessity, another philosophical concept with which he struggles. Necessitarianism entails the reassurance of divine teleological purpose behind all events, but it also threatens the existence of free will. Hence during his lifetime Coleridge explores different philosophies of Necessitarianism in an attempt to reconcile the idea with his commitment to free will. Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), one of the most influential philosophers of immanence in Coleridge's youth, posits in his posthumous *Ethics* a determinism by which the only freedom is that which recognizes one's lack of choice. Ultimately Spinoza preaches a passive intellect: 'no single volition can exist or be determined to act unless it is determined by another cause. Now if will be supposed infinite, it must also be determined to exist and to act by God.'⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴⁶ *CN*, I, § 1194.

⁴⁷ *TT*, I, pp. 94–5.

⁴⁸ *CL*, I, p. 364.

⁴⁹ *Ethics*, trans. by Samuel Shirley, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. by Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 213–382 (p. 235, Part I, Proposition 32).

In his *Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (1809), Schelling argues that God possesses absolute freedom, but that he who acts well does so because God acts in him. While this seems to imply that good deeds are not the product of free will, Schelling makes the distinction that since God manifests freedom, it is independence that gives rise to evil; an argument reliant on a quasi-litigious redefinition of freedom.⁵⁰ There is little assistance for Coleridge in Classical tragedy, or in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in relation to the question of teleology. The ancient tragedians do not conceive of overall teleological purposes or fate in the manner that Coleridge does, but attribute events to fickle and unfair gods. The concept of fate and the need to reconcile it with freedom is more recent; it is a catachrestic and anachronistic interpretation of Greek tragedy that Coleridge and his German contemporaries make rather than an idea that occurs in the texts themselves.

The philosophies of Spinoza, Schelling and Schlegel, as mentioned briefly above, offer different versions of Necessitarianism, but I think that they all lead to a common problem of incompatibility with Coleridge's thought. Most importantly, a passive intellect is not Coleridgean. It is significant, in refuting doctrines of Necessitarianism by citing Heraclitus' claim that 'strife is the basic law and basic power of Being', that Martin Heidegger also alludes to Kant's dismissive notion that free will is incomprehensible.⁵¹ Coleridge's acceptance of Necessitarianism fluctuates. The extent of humanity's free will is a persistent puzzle to him. Liberation from these questions is one of the attractions of Kant's writing, which encourages Coleridge indirectly to explore concepts such as daemonology.

There is no consistency in Coleridge's works, either poetical or critical, in the extent to which events are governed by free will or Necessity. The sufferings of wrongdoers are made to seem inexplicably cruel because their transgressions have been predetermined and daemonically effected. Apparently freely volitional figures such as the Muslims of Granada, the Mariner's crew, and Christabel are impelled to catastrophe by contact with such fated characters as Robespierre, Osorio/Ordonio, the Mariner and Geraldine. As a lecturer too Coleridge implies that both forces can exist simultaneously, and conflict within the tragic arena: 'Freedom within, and Necessity from without'.⁵² In a report on an 1812 lecture, *The Sun* notes that Coleridge has convinced his auditors on 'the notion of Destiny among the ancients, its supposed influence upon the gods as well as upon mortals, and yet its consistency with the attribute of free-will', but unfortunately there is no transcript of the lecture, and thus no evidence of how he seems to have resolved the problem of free will and Necessity.⁵³ In 1818 Coleridge adopts a Schlegelian view of tragedy in which he presents fate and free will in conflict. Fate must be victorious: 'The Powers of Light and the Heroes animated [b]y them fight against

⁵⁰ Schelling: *Of Human Freedom*, trans. by James Gotman (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1936), p. 20.

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 162.

⁵² *LoL*, I, p. 448.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

and partially conquer the Giant Powers of Darkness—but finally all must submit, that is finite, Gods and Heroes to destruction before the unknown Destroyer.⁵⁴

In a philosophical lecture of 1818 Coleridge identifies a middle-ground between absolute freedom and compulsion in a passage indebted to Kant: ‘Our will is to a certain degree in our power, and when it is not it is owing to some prior fault of ours, but the consequences of that will are not in our power.’⁵⁵ While Coleridge here seems to have made progress in the matter of compulsion, he has adopted the modern (mis)reading of *hamartia* as a fundamental character flaw, which is inconsistent with the search for good in Iago and the unexplained archery of the Mariner. Philosophically this move is disappointing as it reduces all crimes to a mysterious, inherent ‘fault’ in a manner that avoids analysis of evil, in this instance with the connotation that it is an absolute that possesses a sort of conceptual opacity and is therefore indisputable. In view of this lack of philosophical clarity I emphasize again that Coleridge’s method is investigative rather than explicative. He persists in his attempts to locate purposes for *hamartia* and anguish within systems of Necessity. In particular I wish to assess Coleridge’s implication that suffering itself is curative.

The Pharmakon and the Pharmakos

The concept of the daemon answers a ‘riddle of the Universe’ partly; it accounts for catastrophic events causally and implies that they are predestined and therefore are necessary. However, the destructive forces of daemonology do not indicate why transgressions must occur. Nor is it clear what morality is entailed when certain characters endure suffering that ensues from involuntary misdeeds. In ‘The Wanderings of Cain’ (1797) a murderer is punished, but the torment inflicted by God upon Cain is indistinguishable from that associated with evil spirits. Cain feels that God ‘persecuteth’ him for killing Abel, and he wishes for death, but he does not repent (l. II.27). In Coleridge’s plan for the poem a ‘fiery spirit’ presses the ‘enormity of guilt’ upon Cain, and bids him to burn out his eyes to expiate his crime (WP.6–7). The incomprehensibility of God’s punishment causes Cain to believe that the evil spirit is good and that God desires his self-mutilation. Nor is agony solely inflicted on wrongdoers: the anguish of Cain’s deceased victim, Abel, is virtually identical to that of his murderer. The spirit that resembles Abel is already dead, yet feels that he is ‘perishing with thirst and hunger’ (II.81–2). In a draft for continuation of the poem, the same fate is allocated to the living, who ‘die of Thirst | for not a Drop remains’ (DR.1–2). In death Abel has been forsaken by the God of the Living, a condition of ‘positive Evil— Eternal Absence from Communion with the Creator’; undue punishment for one who has committed no crime (DR.2–4). Similarly, death and prolonged thirst are inflicted upon the Ancient Mariner’s shipmates.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 283.

⁵⁵ *Lects 1818–19*, I, p. 538.

The Ancient Mariner's ordeal is as mystifying as Cain's. His experience following his supposed rehabilitation is as tortuous as his persecution by Life-in-Death. The movement towards atonement occurs with the Mariner's single act of repentance during his narrative. He blesses the water-snakes, but unconsciously; therefore the act is as likely to be predetermined by a supernatural entity as his crime of shooting the albatross: 'A spring of love gushed from my heart, | And I blessed them unaware' (284–5). Yet it is evident that the recurrence of his painful experiences is guaranteed: 'till my ghastly tale is told, | This heart within me burns' (584–5). With valid evidence Patrick J. Keane detects in the poem 'a God who is perhaps more punitive than redemptive, and who is certainly more an object of "fear" than his providential minion, the devil.'⁵⁶ With the addition of the interpretative marginal-gloss in 1817, Coleridge attempts to Christianize the poem. He alludes to the Mariner's ordeals as rites of penitence, yet the implied relation between the daemonic spirits of the poem and the Christian explanation of the gloss sits uneasily. This is the emendation of the later, Trinitarian Coleridge, who wishes to preserve the bulk of the text, but wants also to rein in aspects of the poem that are incompatible with Christianity. As the polar spirit ceases to impel the ship at speed, the commentary reads that the Mariner's 'penance begins anew' (glossing 430–33). However, despite the Mariner's aphorisms on universal love, and the claim in the gloss that he teaches, 'by his own example, love and reverence', his motive is discomfort rather than enlightenment: 'And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land' (glossing 610–13 and 582–5). Thus I find that, despite the implications of the gloss, the spirit of the poem remains pagan. The Mariner's experience is more akin to that of the persecuted Orestes than a Christian journey of penance. While Coleridge fails to pinpoint a Christian allegory with the gloss, its introduction is an important example of his near-obsession with identifying redemptive meaning.

Coleridge's philosophical need to explain torment evokes Schiller's claim, in his essay 'On the Pathetic', that suffering should not be portrayed merely as purposeless.⁵⁷ I suggest a parallel between the pains of Coleridge's characters and those of Prometheus. While the thematic emphasis of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* is on the eponym as a figure of endurance and salvation, an interpretative problem arises in Zeus' punishment of him. It is difficult to establish Zeus' sentence as a penalty to encourage rehabilitation rather than a violent act of revenge.⁵⁸ Although Prometheus' imprisonment is explained in reference to Necessity in the opening speech of Strength and throughout the play, this becomes less credible with the revelation of cruel and imaginative torture to come from the eagle sent by Zeus, which will gnaw at the prisoner's liver.

⁵⁶ Patrick J. Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: 'The Ancient Mariner' and Robinson Crusoe* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), p. 352.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schiller, 'On the Pathetic', in *Essays*, pp. 45–69 (p. 45).

⁵⁸ See for example Danielle S. Allen, *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Ultimately, Prometheus is a redemptive figure in myth, who endures Zeus' punishment and discourages the annihilation of humanity. Yet commentators tend also to identify negative traits in Prometheus. In particular, the destructive potential of Prometheus' defiant temperament is comparable to Zeus' anger. Mindful of such duality, Coleridge terms Prometheus 'the Redeemer and the Devil jumbled together'.⁵⁹ Prometheus is a *pharmakon*; both illness and antidote. George Thomson cites Empedocles' notion of the Orphic Wheel of Necessity and the punishment of immortals to contend that Prometheus' sin is daemonic.⁶⁰ Hence, the *pharmakon* is both the disease of evil, daemonic activity itself and the solution to the misfortune caused by that activity. Coleridge views Mohammed in this manner, who founded empires and then persecuted their occupants: he 'scatter'd abroad both Evil and Blessing' ('Mahomet: A Fragment', l. 2). Jacques Derrida relates the concept specifically to controlling spirits but also invites a political reading. He claims that *pharmakon* means a *coup*, 'that which pertains to an attack of demonic possession or is used as a curative *against* such an attack.' This is appropriate to a study of *The Fall of Robespierre*. Yet I find it more useful when Derrida defines the *pharmakon* in constant flux. The *pharmakon* provides 'the medium in which opposites are opposed'; tragic conflict is thus a Coleridgean polarity.⁶¹ Moreover, Derrida suggests that the act of philosophy is a *pharmakon* to a person who feels threatened by writing. While Derrida's allusion is to the philosophy of Plato, which manifests a verbal logocentricity in suspicious opposition to written forms, it is fascinating to extend his ideas to Coleridge, in whose case poetry and philosophy vie for prominence within one person. This indicates a predilection for the struggle of the *pharmakon* as Derrida conceives it.

Prometheus can be classified more particularly as a *pharmakos* – a term for a scapegoat, related to *pharmakon* – whose torment is justifiable by its benefit of the multitude, even if this benefit is not obvious. Antigone too is both *pharmakon* and *pharmakos*: by law her contact with her brother's corpse pollutes the city, and it is only by her death that Thebes can be purged. Yet this sacrifice has become necessary because the gods demand that the dead be buried, and Antigone alone dares to defy Creon's edict on funereal rites for Polyneices. In *King Oedipus*, the ruler himself is a pollutant who brings plague and famine upon Thebes, but the most serious crime in the play is committed by the public. Jocasta finds that the prediction that Laius' son would murder him seems untrue, for it has been reported that bandits slew him, and Oedipus is sceptical about the prophecy that he would kill his father, whom he believes to be Polybus, the Corinthian. The chorus doubts the truth of the oracle, so implying that religion is false. The ordeal and expulsion of Oedipus forms the

⁵⁹ *TT*, I, p. 58.

⁶⁰ George Thomson, 'Promethia', in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed. by Erich Segal, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 104–22 (pp. 105–6).

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 170, 127.

ritual sacrifice that purges the collective guilt of the blasphemous community. The drama bears the warning that leadership breeds hubris, a lesson that Coleridge revives in his introduction to *The Fall of Robespierre*.

Tragic sacrifice was a salient literary concept in Coleridge's lifetime, and it is not surprising that the *pharmakos* should be present in his works. Adaptations of the ancient Greek dramas formed a battleground for the views of neoclassicists and Romantics, conservatives and liberals. The Oedipus myth was prominent in this arena. Thomas Maurice's 1779 translation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* attacks the abuse of political influence. In his Dedication to Lord Marlborough he establishes his intention to 'expose to public detestation those vices, to which the distinguished rank of the offender [...] may have given a long and secure dominion over the human mind.'⁶² Oedipus, the overly ambitious ruler, is to Maurice a 'monster, black with incest and with blood, | This most abhorr'd of gods, and all mankind.'⁶³ Thomas Francklin's version of Sophocles' play, reprinted in 1788, criticizes the Church of England in his depiction of the prophet Tiresias, who makes threats and is unsympathetic, and speaks with an unhelpful 'affected obscurity'.⁶⁴ Robert Potter's *Oedipus, King of Thebes*, included in his second collection of translations of Sophocles of 1788, popularized the innocent Oedipus, the victim of an evil daemon from infancy who is 'sunk beneath a flood of dreadful woes' (l. 1590). The tragedy concludes with a pious emphasis on oracular authority and the need to expel Oedipus to cleanse the polluted Thebes. This successful translation contributed to the inscription in Britain's cultural conscience of the concepts of the involuntary wrongdoer and the sacrificial scapegoat or *pharmakos*, who endures torment for a beneficial purpose. But while the *pharmakos* of Greek tragedy is introduced to cure a particular social ailment, Romantic uses of the device, fixated with questions of fate and Necessity, tend to employ it in grander schemes of teleological purpose. The Romantic preoccupation with such victims gives rise to such figures as Godwin's Caleb Williams, whose unjust persecution allows the preservation of class divisions and aristocracy at the expense of truth, and the Promethean criminal Victor Frankenstein who, with his creation, must suffer to demonstrate the folly of ambitious science.

The fascination with Oedipus also manifested in Europe. Six versions of *Oedipus Tyrannus* appeared in France from 1784 to 1818. Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh explain that the Oedipus myth was 'regularly used in the latter part of the eighteenth century in France in order to explore the burning issues surrounding the competing republican and monarchical ideologies.'⁶⁵ By some, such as Voltaire,

⁶² Thomas Maurice, *Poems and Miscellaneous Pieces, with a Free Translation of the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles* (London: Dodsley, 1779), p. iii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶⁴ Thomas Francklin, *The Tragedies of Sophocles, Translated from the Greek; with a Dissertation on Antient Tragedy*, 2nd edn rev. (London: Lowndes, 1788), p. 336n.

⁶⁵ Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 216.

Oedipus is respectable for his curious nature – his irrepressible urge to investigate when warned not to – and is even seen as a father of the Enlightenment.⁶⁶ Hence it is appropriate that Coleridge's Robespierre is an Oedipal figure, and the nature of suffering in Coleridge's works becomes more comprehensible in consideration of the *pharmakos*. Like Oedipus, the tyrant Robespierre is admirably determined and resourceful, but his actions are terrible and his sacrifice is necessary. Coleridge's conception of Robespierre retains the mixture of respect, abhorrence and pity that is associated with Oedipus. A poem 'to a Young Lady' of autumn 1794 articulates Coleridge's ambivalence: 'Fall'n is th' oppressor, friendless, ghastly, low, | And my heart akes, tho' MERCY struck the blow' (27–8).

Despite Coleridge's wish for the French Revolution to establish a better society, in 1794 he questions the employment of 'Bad means for a good end—I cannot conceive that <there can be> any road to Heaven through Hell.'⁶⁷ Yet Coleridge's sentiments remain mixed, and his admiration for Robespierre's resolve is still evident in his assessment that the revolutionary 'possessed a glowing ardour that still remembered the *end*, and a cool ferocity that never either overlooked, or scrupled, the *means*.'⁶⁸ Coleridge conceives Robespierre not only as misdirected, but blind to the true consequences of his reign of terror. A literary and historical parallel occurs in Goethe's assessment of Napoleon, whose success he attributes to a Socratic daemon:

We should have a daemon who would lead us around daily on a leash and who would tell us what is to be done. But the good spirit deserts us, and we become weak and grope around in the dark. In that respect Napoleon was really quite a fellow! Always illumined, always clear and decisive, and endowed at every moment with sufficient energy to undertake whatever he had recognized as advantageous and necessary.⁶⁹

By contrast, Robespierre is impelled by the Sophoclean daemon that leads to destruction while the victim maintains belief that his free volition is intact. As Oedipus strives to discover the cause of plague and famine in Thebes without suspecting that it is himself, Coleridge's Robespierre does not recognize that it is his methods, and not avarice alone, that pollute society. Coleridge expresses this irony in a brilliant depiction of arrogant political rhetoric which recalls Shakespeare's Timon of Athens, himself the scapegoat for a city's wrongs. Robespierre excuses his brutality by allusion to Necessity. He revels in the hatred he provokes as glorifying the unpopular policies that he believes are curative:

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁶⁷ *CN*, I, § 4.

⁶⁸ *Lects 1795*, p. 35. Seamus Perry relates these passages, adding that 'the point is a nice one for an Optimist Necessitarian.' See *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*, ed. by Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 138.

⁶⁹ Cited from Theodore Ziolkowski, 'Napoleon's Impact on Germany: A Rapid Survey', *Yale French Studies*, 26 (1960), 94–105 (p. 101).

In our vitals
 Works not the king-bred poison of rebellion?
 Say, what shall counteract the selfish plottings
 Of wretches, cold of heart, nor awed by fears
 Of him, whose power directs th' eternal justice?
 Terror? or secret-sapping gold? The first
 Heavy, but transient as the ills that cause it;
 And to the virtuous patriot rendered light
 By the necessities that gave it birth:
 The other fouls the fount of the republic,
 Making it flow polluted to all ages:
 Inoculates the state with a slow venom,
 That once imbibed, must be continued ever.
 Myself incorruptible I ne'er could bribe them—
 Therefore they hate me. (I.149–63)

Robespierre displaces responsibility for revolutionary violence, and cites monarchy as its cause rather than the demands of revolutionaries. In a further evocation of *King Oedipus*, the dramatic irony of this passage rests in Robespierre's use of the language associated with the *pharmakon* – 'poison', 'ills', 'polluted', 'venom' – without acknowledging that he has inherited the kingly tyranny. It is he, embodying violence, who must die to purge French society of its ills. Hence Robespierre's daemon drives him towards his ruin.

The sacrifice of Robespierre as *pharmakos* should purge the atrocities of his rule. His fall accords with the cyclical nature of violence hypothesized by Thomas Paine in 1791: 'They learn it from the governments they live under, and retaliate the punishments they have been accustomed to behold.'⁷⁰ It is apt that Jacques Derrida defines the daemon in terms of a *coup*, as though the victims of an oppressive regime can become seized by a force of madness or intoxication that compels them to wield violence themselves. In Coleridge and Southey's play, the execution of Robespierre will not resolve the problem of violence in France, as the daemonic energies associated with power corrupt all who are possessed by them. William Jewett indicates that the Thermidorians, motivated by fear, deny their own role in the aberrations of post-Revolutionary France by the 'reduction of all possible political dangers to the fantasized power of individual agents'. Hence they attribute all wrongdoing to Robespierre and believe that the Terror will 'culminate in the sacrifice of the single individual who touches off the chain of power fantasies.'⁷¹ As this belief is erroneous, the sacrifice cannot put an end to violence but is merely a continuation of it. This lesson is not apparent to Robespierre's colleagues, but can be discerned by the reader or viewer of the play. Coleridge and Southey anticipate Marx's idea that a revolution cannot bring about true reform but only pass the reins of tyranny to new hands, but their fears are explained by daemonic agency rather than socio-political theory.

⁷⁰ Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. by Henry Collins (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 79.

⁷¹ 'The Fall of Robespierre and the Sublime Machine of Agency', p. 434.

In the punishment of Osorio/Ordonio there is evidence of Coleridge's early radical politics, and a strong sense that he satirizes Catholic tenets of penitence and atonement against the background of the Inquisition's brutality. *Osorio* and the revised version *Remorse* (1813) are preoccupied with order. Dutiful recognition of the authority of spirits parallels the satisfaction of literary formula in the plays. The artistic figure of Albert/Alvar, named a 'painter' of 'fancies', subverts the genre of the revenge tragedy with his unclear plan to awaken his brother's conscience rather than killing him (*Osorio*, II.ii.19, *Remorse*, II.ii.42). To execute this plan he exaggerates his brother's moral plight, and by implication the achievement of his assumed reformation. Reeve Parker notes that the play's audience and characters are equally deceived by the conjuring scene, which depicts Osorio/Ordonio as a murderer. At this point in the play he is a conspirator in a murder that did not take place and not, as Zulimez has been persuaded to term him, a 'murderer' (*Remorse* II.ii.30).⁷²

Daemonic powers reveal the vanity of Albert/Alvar and his wish to become an agent of atonement in disregard of universal intent, and achieve this with the sacrifice of Osorio/Ordonio as *pharmakos*. In *Remorse* it is explicit that spirits conspire to make a murderer of Ordonio. Isidore speaks of 'Beings that live, yet not for the eye' that have saved him from plunging into a precipice, but it transpires that they guide him towards death at the hands of Ordonio (IV.i.39). This prompts the Moors' act of revenge. In *Osorio*, Alhadra recognizes that Osorio's evil is no mere matter of conscience, but is daemonic, 'like the Spirit of Chaos [...], | Cursing all lovely things' (*Osorio*, V.ii.191–3). In *Remorse* Alhadra slays Ordonio, and I assume that Osorio is carried away to his death in the earlier play's conclusion. Alhadra acknowledges order in fulfilment of the requirements of revenge tragedy and her recognition of the spiritual hierarchy: 'I thank thee Heaven! thou hast ordain'd it wisely' (*Osorio*, V.ii.201). In the positive, final speech of *Osorio*, Alhadra appreciates the purgative function of Osorio's villainy. Through Alhadra, Coleridge implies that the intent of the pantheistic One Life might end all cruelty with a hundred such men as Osorio, and that sacrifice should be welcomed. The methods of the Inquisition, which imprisons Alhadra, evoke William Pitt's suspension of the right of *Habeas Corpus* in May 1794, which allowed for detention without a formal criminal charge. However, in the violent conclusion to the play, as in *The Fall of Robespierre*, Coleridge warns against potential reactions to contemporary, domestic oppression.

In *Remorse*, Alhadra's speech is replaced by Alvar's more Christian interpretation of a heavenly voice, and the purpose of Ordonio's sacrifice is to impart a lesson that one must heed one's 'inward Monitress' (V.i.289). Coleridge emphasizes the inadequacy of Catholic repentance with the realization that Ordonio cannot be saved. Fatally wounded, Ordonio pleads for 'ATONEMENT', but Alvar recognizes that beneficial effect is not possible: 'Conscience rules us

⁷² Reeve Parker, *Romantic Tragedies*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 87 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 120.

e'en against our choice' to reject morality, and remorse, if at all, comes 'too late' (V.i.287–94). If *Osorio*'s final speech reveals a radical Coleridge enthused with revolutionary energy, the conclusion to *Remorse* contains palpable regret that sacrifice has yielded disappointment rather than political reform.

In 'The Wanderings of Cain' and the 'Ancient Mariner', Coleridge departs from defined historical contexts to present figures that are more easily conceived as universal representatives of error and guilt. While Robespierre is the inheritor of monarchical oppression, and the characters of *Osorio/Remorse* participate in a historical struggle between Muslims and Christians, Cain and the Ancient Mariner are archetypal criminals. Cain is the first murderer in Biblical history. The Mariner's initial failure to comprehend his crime, and the inconstant superstition of his shipmates, who change from condemning to lauding the shooting, suggest that it is also an unprecedented act.

Cain and the Mariner are indicative of the emergence of modern tragedy's concern with ordinary people rather than sovereigns. The sense of the Mariner's status as an Everyman figure is intensified by his anonymity and the vagueness of his origins. Indeed, the texts of 'The Wanderings of Cain' and the 'Ancient Mariner' tell us so little of the characters as to accord with the concept of the modern tragic hero whose development Søren Kierkegaard's aesthete observes in *Either/Or* (1843). Such a figure, Kierkegaard writes, is 'refracted [...] out of every immediate relation to state, race, and destiny [...] and] even out of his own preceding life [...]. Hence modern tragedy has no epic foreground, no epic heritage. The hero stands and falls entirely on his own deeds.'⁷³ Cain and the Mariner lack 'epic' contexts. They are, as Kierkegaard suggests of the modern tragic-hero, removed from traditional foregrounds of nobility and war. Cain and the Mariner also seem to be removed from history, existing in worlds that are anachronistic (or more properly *outside* of time) and therefore universally representative. This universality is underscored by the relation of the framing device of the 'Ancient Mariner' – the meeting and conversation – to the central narrative. As he describes the nightly recurrence of his pains and the act of recounting his experience, the Mariner indicates its iterability and creates a *mise-en-abyme* of tragic pathos. Thus through history the Mariner's tale retains educative value; it stands alongside present time in infinite regress.

The physical worlds of the Mariner and Cain are further aspects of the broad, didactic applicability of their tales. Indeterminate or unusual environments indicate that each character has departed from quotidian existence and occupies an ambiguous moral position. In Cain's case, damnation is writ large in the masculine landscape, a wasteland untouched by seasons. To look upon this place causes the beholder to become 'desolate' himself (II.59). In Part 2 of the 'Ancient Mariner' the numinous presence of the sun is obscured in accordance with the Mariner's penumbral moral-state. In these ahistoric contexts and surreal landscapes of

⁷³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 143.

pathetic fallacy, the experiences of Coleridge's characters form aetiological narratives of tragedy. Freud and Girard cite such instances of unrepeatable acts as the origins of law and tragedy.

As a *pharmakos*, Cain is comparable to Milton's Satan: he is beyond personal redemption but can be used as a paradigm to discourage repetition of his error. It is evident that Cain's suffering is to be prolonged and exemplary: 'his countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and were still to continue to be' (II.56–8). This recalls the turmoil of Satan as he approaches Eden, at which point Milton's accentuation of the inexorable prospect of further transgression hints at God's intention that the fallen angels' rebellion should provide a didactic background narrative to the edicts that govern life in Eden:

Now conscience wakes despair
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue.
(*Paradise Lost*, IV.23–6)

Lucy Newlyn detects further Miltonic analogues in Coleridge's works, and compares the Wedding Guest of the 'Ancient Mariner' to Adam prior to the fall. Both are 'technically still innocent, but initiated into the fallen world by listening'.⁷⁴ With this reference to 'listening', Newlyn reminds us that Adam has been told of Satan's rebellion by Raphael in Book V. Satan's punishment for rebellion against God becomes a warning of the consequences of disobedience. Thus Satan's torment is also a sacrifice whose benefit is the iteration and demonstration of the law; that God must not be defied. It is clear that Adam's fall is partially due to a failure to learn from Satan's error.

As she likens the Wedding Guest to the 'listening' Adam, Newlyn casts the wrongdoer, the Mariner himself, as a Satanic figure, like Cain. All are sacrificed with the purpose of establishing law. Cain and the Mariner are presented in ambiguous settings that reflect unknown spiritual states because they have committed acts that are abhorrent, but that precede any law that forbids them. In the Bible, Cain's murder of Abel occurs prior to Moses' descent from Sinai with the commandment that 'thou shalt not kill'. The shipmates of the Mariner are uncertain of whether the death of the albatross has been beneficial or harmful to their voyage; they cannot decide whether or not it is an immoral deed. Cain, Abel, the Mariner and the albatross are sacrificed to society as *pharmakoi*. By involvement in events that are considered so heinous that they must never be repeated, these figures give rise to laws that aim to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities. 'You are not hung for stealing a horse', as Coleridge quotes an old adage, 'but that horses may not be stolen.'⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Newlyn, 'Paradise Lost', p. 195.

⁷⁵ *LoL*, I, p. 79n.

Suffering can yield spiritual reward for the victim in Coleridge's works. The sagely Ancient Mariner gains dignity from his adventure. He displays the *elemosyne* or heroic endurance that characterizes the travelled and wise Oedipus of Colonus. Coleridge and Southey's treatment of Robespierre ensures that the tyrant remains resolutely principled and courageous to the end. The eponym of 'Christabel' might display similar heroic endurance had Coleridge completed the poem as Derwent Coleridge claims he intended to: 'The sufferings of Christabel were to have been represented as vicarious, endured for her "lover far away"; and Geraldine, no witch or goblin, or malignant being of any kind, but a sprit, executing her appointed task with the best good will.'⁷⁶ In thus dignifying tragic victims Coleridge's philosophical optimism is comparable to Schelling's glorification of tragic strife despite its futility. Tragedy illuminates the paradoxes of human freedom:

It was by *allowing* tragedy to *struggle* against the superior power of fate that Greek tragedy honoured freedom [...]. It was a *great* idea to have man willingly accept punishment even for an inevitable crime; in this way he was able to demonstrate his freedom precisely through the loss of this freedom.⁷⁷

While I think that it is a Coleridgean trait to seek kinds of spiritual worth in tragic conflict, and that he explores this matter using the supernatural, in practice it is impossible to evaluate the implications of spiritual agency in his works consistently. In 'Christabel' the second part differs from the first by its lesser interest in daemonic agency. Coleridge presents Geraldine conventionally in the supernatural-Gothic mode as vampire or a lamia, rather than the mysterious and sympathetic Geraldine of Part I. The two extant parts are not sufficiently consistent for the reader to extrapolate the intended, complete poem's treatment of suffering or its meaning. Not all trial yields dignity as reward in Coleridge's works, and his inability to adapt the projected events of 'Christabel' to his optimistic philosophy may be a reason for his inability to complete the poem. This may also be true of 'The Three Graves', in which it is unclear why the evil mother's curses on Mary, Ellen or Edward should succeed. The characters cannot be said to benefit from their experience in any way, and no obvious lesson arises for the reader.

The ritual sacrifices in Coleridge's completed works serve his aesthetic aim to improve the audience morally. Schiller writes of sensitivity to suffering as a persistent natural trait that elicits pathos, which must be encouraged in art for humanity's benefit.⁷⁸ I think that Coleridge shares this belief without expressing it quite so explicitly. Such a philosophy accounts for the frequent occurrence of torment in Coleridge's works. The inclusion in the 'Ancient Mariner' of an internal auditor, the Wedding Guest, demonstrates Coleridge's conception of

⁷⁶ Cited from Nethercot, *Tryermaine*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Schelling, 'Tenth Letter', in *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. Quoted in Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 77.

⁷⁸ 'On the Pathetic', pp. 45–6.

the ideal reader's response to the poem's content and by inference the treatment of crime and punishment in his works. The Wedding Guest responds to tragic events in adherence to the principles delineated by Aristotle: with fear and pity. He sympathizes with the Mariner and exclaims 'God save thee' (79). Twice during the Mariner's account the Wedding Guest becomes frightened (224, 345). While he mocks the Mariner initially, later the Wedding Guest respects the speaker for his ideal and for his *tlemosyne*.

In Coleridge's works, daemonic agents impel involuntary experiences like the Mariner's with the goal of humanity's amelioration. The spiritual improvement of such free agents as the Wedding Guest or any audience alerts them to the choice of turning from such vice as revelry, 'sadder and [...] wiser' (624). By the brutal ritual sacrifices in Coleridge's works the reader or viewer, like the Wedding Guest, is vicariously solemnified and hallowed.

It is because Coleridge's invocation of the supernatural is investigative, and therefore inconsistent, that interpreting the Coleridgean tragic as didactic does not yield an entirely satisfactory solution to the problem of anguish inflicted to serve Necessity. Coleridge's victims can suffer in order to demonstrate laws, but these laws are not always just. The sacrifices are cruel revelations of what Godwin terms 'things as they are': actuality in an unjust universe. For a full understanding of Coleridge's tragic universe, it is necessary to examine the reality that informed it. Coleridge's tragic vision is not limited to literary tragedy's presence by influence and allusion in his works but, I believe, it is also a method of reading his world.

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Chapter 3

The Catastrophes of Real Life

It is a commonplace of critical theory that certain ages bring about tragedy more than others. Raymond Williams studies ‘historical conditions of tragedy’, general circumstances in which the mode becomes prevalent:

Important tragedy seems to occur, neither in periods of real stability, nor in periods of open and decisive conflict. Its most common historical setting is the period preceding the substantial breakdown and transformation of an important culture. Its condition is the real tension between old and new: between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities.¹

Williams’s conditions accord with George Steiner’s hypothesis of tragedy’s sporadic occurrence. Steiner examines the factors ‘favourable for tragedy’ and periods during which they have manifested successfully:

Over wide reaches of time and in diverse places, elements of language, material circumstance, and individual talent suddenly gather toward the production of a body of serious drama [...]. Such high moments occurred in Periclean Athens, in England during the period 1580–1640, in seventeenth-century Spain, in France between 1630 and 1690.²

Similar claims were made in Coleridge’s time too; in a lecture of 1808 he anticipates Williams’s observation by explaining that drama originates ‘in a small state under a popular government, in a warlike and unsettled age.’³

In this chapter I study Coleridge’s reading of real events as tragedies. He depicts actual people as tragic heroes or villains and contemplates misery that is heightened and widespread in the world around him. To Coleridge history unfolds like a drama. The conditions that modern critics posit as stimuli for the creation of tragedy are themselves read as tragic by Coleridge. The French Revolution and its legacy of war satisfy Williams’s requirements of instability, uncertainty and transformation: ‘a time of revolution’, Williams writes, ‘is so evidently a time of violence, dislocation and extended suffering that it is natural to feel it as tragedy.’⁴ While Steiner bemoans the lack of good tragic drama written during the Romantic age, he speculates that actual events were so dire that people had neither wish

¹ *Modern Tragedy*, pp. 53–4.

² *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 106–7.

³ *LoL*, I, p. 43.

⁴ *Modern Tragedy*, p. 64.

nor need to witness catastrophe in the theatre also. The tragic mode was made obsolete by the tragedy of experience. Certainly, Edmund Burke finds that the vicissitudes of the period resemble the reversals of tragedy, although he is uneasy about the mean-spirited responses he detects to misfortune in real life. To Burke such insensitivity indicates that the beneficial morality of tragedy is not borne outside the theatre by auditors:

When kings are hurl'd from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama, and become the objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good, we should behold such disasters in the moral, as we should behold a miracle in the physical order of things. We are alarmed into reflexion; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity; our weak unthinking pride is humbled, under the dispensations of mysterious wisdom.—Some tears might be drawn from me, if such a spectacle were exhibited on the stage. I should be truly ashamed of finding myself in that superficial, theatric sense of painted distress, whilst I could exult over it in real life. With such a perverted mind, I could never venture to show my face at a tragedy.⁵

Moreover, the question for Burke is not whether the events of revolutionary Europe are sufficiently catastrophic to be considered tragic, but whether they would have made too gruesome and disheartening a spectacle for the standards of the ancients:

No theatric audience in Athens would bear what has been borne, in the midst of the real tragedy of this triumphal day; a principal actor weighing, as it were in scales hung in a shop of horrors,—so much actual crime against so much contingent advantage,—and after putting in and out weights, declaring that the balance was on the side of the advantages.⁶

Michel Foucault observes that history only has signification when we choose it to, and warns that the patterns historians identify tend to be ‘of their own making’.⁷ Karl Popper examines the ‘theistic historicism’ of the nineteenth century, and observes that some commentators of the time appear to interpret the sequence of history as a Shakespearean play written by God.⁸ Popper refers to Hegel specifically. As Jeffrey Hipolito argues, Coleridge is not a Hegelian politically or philosophically, but the historical scope of their thought is comparable, and Coleridge too views history as a process.⁹ In his late poetry (1829–30), Coleridge derives an epigraph from *Troilus and Cressida* in which he insists that there are lessons in history, not merely facts:

⁵ *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 119–20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–21.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972; repr. Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2007), p. 3.

⁸ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies II: Hegel and Marx* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2003; repr. 2006), p. 300.

⁹ Jeffrey Hipolito, ‘Coleridge’s Lectures 1818–1819: On the History of Philosophy’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, pp. 254–70.

THERE IS A MYSTERY IN THE SOUL OF STATE,
WHICH HATH AN OPERATION MORE DIVINE
THAN OUR MERE CHRONICLERS DARE MEDDLE WITH.
(‘Epigraph Derived from *Troilus and Cressida*’)

There are two main reasons for Coleridge to read history and contemporary events as tragedy. One accords with a key point I made previously: that Coleridge needs to accommodate catastrophe within an optimistic philosophy. This is as true of Coleridge contemplating Britain’s war with France as it is of him reading tragic plays that impart lessons on ‘Atonement’. The second reason is that Coleridge is primarily a literary thinker. If this is an obvious comment, it surprises me how often critics divorce the political thinker from the poet, except in the case of the few significant poems connected explicitly with historical events. Admittedly, Coleridge himself seems to discourage the reader from paying close attention to the historical and political contexts of his most famous poetical works. For example, in *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge recalls his own contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* as primarily ‘directed to persons and characters supernatural’.¹⁰ In ‘Dejection: An Ode’, Coleridge regrets the extent of his dedication to dehumanizing, ‘abstruse research’ (‘Dejection’, l. 89). The prevalence of New Historicism equipped critics to detect the socio-political resonances even of poems that seem at first to be concerned only with very abstract or aesthetic matters. But that theoretical trend in Romantic studies seemed only to generate one-way traffic: rarely do scholars relate Coleridge’s overtly political and social works – particularly in prose pieces and lectures – back to his literary concerns. Dutifully the Princeton Bollingen editors of Coleridge annotate the sources of his abundant literary allusions and devices, but do not comment on the significance of how many there are, nor whether they have any cumulative effect. I think that they do. These references are evidence that, impelled by a need to interpret events, Coleridge turns to literature, and often tragedy specifically. This association is not a casual likeness of historical developments to a Shakespearean world-as-stage for their ability to surprise and trouble in the manner of drama. Instead Coleridge believes that ancient tragedy captures truths about crises in life with didactic purpose. These truths can be retrieved from drama to better comprehend life itself.

Coleridge’s attitude to Thomas Poole’s account of a notorious murder exemplifies his tendency to read real events as tragedy, and how he perceives the author’s duty to convey tragic import to an audience. Coleridge first heard the tale from Poole in 1797, and was still sufficiently moved by recollection of it in 1809 to request a manuscript for publication in *The Friend*: ‘Do, do let me have that divine narrative of Robert Walford.’¹¹

The pathos of Poole’s account is typical of the rural tales that fascinated Wordsworth and Coleridge. In 1789 John Walford, a charcoal burner, murdered

¹⁰ *BL*, II, p. 6.

¹¹ *CL*, III, p. 235.

his estranged wife, but remained a sympathetic figure locally despite his crime. Walford's wife, born Jane Sharney, was faulted in accounts of her death with having seduced Walford. Locals viewed Sharney as the saboteur of Walford's engagement to his true love, Anne Rice of Adcombe, whose fidelity to Walford at the time of his execution added to the pathos of the episode.¹² Due to increased incidents of murder in Somersetshire, the unusual decision was made to hang Walford in public and to display his corpse. In his exemplary death Walford was cast as a sacrificial victim. A deeper sense of Walford as a tragic figure emerges from the remarkably tolerant attitude towards the crime that Poole depicts in the community of Adcombe. While the seductress Jane Sharney seems to be at fault for her own death, Walford becomes a victim of circumstance, compelled to act as he did. Poole gives the account a fatalistic air; Walford's execution is exemplary and satisfies the requirements of law, but opposes public sympathy.

In response to Poole's narrative, Coleridge implies that to articulate such grisly subject-matter as the Walford murder initiates an author as a true artist: 'That divine narrative of Robert Walford [...] stamps you a Poet of the first Class in the *pathetic* & the *painting* of Poetry, so rarely combined.'¹³ In his preface to the 1816 publication of 'The Three Graves', which Coleridge took over from Wordsworth in 1797 but did not complete, Coleridge is keen to authenticate the poem's origins: 'The outlines of the Tale are positive Facts, and of no very distant date.' Protesting against the unsettling events of the ballad that he 'was not led to chuse this story from any partiality to the tragic', Coleridge ennobles himself as obedient to the poet's duty, which demands analysis of authentic hardship. The main concern of this chapter is to demonstrate how Coleridge turns tragic interpretations of reality to didactic purpose. In a lecture of 1795, Coleridge expresses the need for 'a Revolution bloodless, like Poland's, but not, like Poland's, assassinated by the foul Treason of Tyrants against Liberty.'¹⁴ This hope permeates Coleridge's dramatic and poetical works prior to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In his Bristol lectures, Coleridge refers to diverse social issues to demonstrate the need for reform. He notes the plight of British soldiers abroad, the exploitation of workers, the practices of crimping and scalping, slavery and the related taste for luxury items. The young Coleridge invokes real-life suffering in poetry and plays to attack the government, and to suggest a general solution to Britain's problems; that a new political system is required to establish a content society. By the doctrine of Necessitarianism Coleridge believes that revolution throughout Europe and Britain is inevitable. He uses the tragic to reassure his audience that a better society will emerge after the upheaval that instigates such change.

¹² For Thomas Poole's account of Walford's story see David Worthy, *A Quantock Tragedy: The Walford Murder of 1789*, 2nd edn (Over Stowey: Friarn Press, 2004), pp. 29–44.

¹³ *CL*, III, p. 235.

¹⁴ *Lects 1795*, p. 7.

Tragic Dissent

In political and religious lectures of 1795, Coleridge indicates the tragic potential of his age with a catalogue of social problems: 'the oppressed feel and complain'; 'the evil is great'; 'the folly of the rulers of mankind becomes daily more wild and ruinous'; the war against France is 'an Evil of [...] incalculable magnitude'; 'there is scarcely a Vice which Government does not teach us'.¹⁵ As he comments in a letter on how 'sadly' the Polish revolution proceeds, Coleridge anticipates that all of Europe will follow France to insurrection and prolonged unrest.¹⁶

I wish to examine the process by which Coleridge develops the intensity of such sentiments to achieve what Richard B. Sewall terms 'tragic dissent'.¹⁷ Coleridge's purpose is not solely to provide an aesthetic experience of tragedy, but to influence the political opinions of his audiences. Such a strategy is evident in *The Fall of Robespierre*, not solely in the text as it was published in 1794, but in the comments that Coleridge makes about it elsewhere. He intimates that the play is to be read neither as strict truth nor entirely as fiction. It is a blend of both modes whereby Coleridge uses invention to direct the reader's association of tragic emotions of fear and pity with the real events depicted in the play. Additionally, the generic and creative contexts of *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) not only demonstrate Coleridge's evocation of the tragic in his portion of that play, but also the means by which he achieves tragic effect in other writings, particularly in his reliance on the Greek-tragic tradition of the woman's lament.

While *The Fall of Robespierre* is a collaborative work, my focus is on the first act, composed by Coleridge alone, which is the only portion to include fictional elements. Robert Southey wrote the second and third acts, to which Coleridge contributed only minor revisions. Southey uses no invented characters or fictional incidents, but simply converts newspaper transcripts of Robespierre's trial into blank verse. By contrast Coleridge reads history as tragedy. He signals this conflation with inconsistency over which classification should be applied to the play. The subtitle states that it is 'an Historic Drama'. However, in correspondence from the year of composition, Coleridge refers to the drama six times as a 'tragedy' and never at all as 'historic'.¹⁸ The 'historic drama' subtitle justifies the play by insisting upon the long-term significance of the French Revolution. Simultaneously, it places Coleridge and Southey's drama subtly alongside such history plays as Shakespeare's; perhaps an ironic gesture given the haste of the play's composition and Coleridge's claim that '*such a Work*' was not worthy of attribution to two authors.¹⁹ However, the use of the term 'tragedy' for *The Fall of*

¹⁵ *Lects 1795*, pp. 18, 48, 54, 221.

¹⁶ *CL*, I, p. 86.

¹⁷ Richard B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959; repr. 1969), p. 85.

¹⁸ *CL*, I, pp. 98, 102, 104, 106, 110, 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Robespierre establishes Robespierre himself as a tragic figure to be contemplated alongside Prometheus, Oedipus, King Lear, Macbeth and Hamlet. Where a tragedy's subject is historical, fictional elements may be introduced, such as in Aeschylus' *Persians* – a play about the Battle of Salamis written by one of its participants – in which the ghost of King Darius rises and attributes his son's invasion of Greece to mischievous daemons. In Coleridge's works he imposes his inventions onto actual events to evoke tragic pathos. Real occurrences establish the relevance of Coleridge's subject to his audience's circumstances, while the emotional force of the tragic is a tool of dissent that urges political action.

Edward Kessler complains that 'in the first act of *The Fall of Robespierre* [...] generalities and abstractions such as Liberty, Conscience and Freedom seem like empty tokens moved about in a series of verbal exercises.'²⁰ Richard Holmes dismisses the entire play as 'a farrago of rhetorical bad verse.'²¹ I will assess the complaints of Kessler and Holmes in relation to a typical passage from the play; a speech in which Robespierre responds to Barrere's fears with *antirrhetis*, and that culminates with the use of an image of the 'tottering pillar' borrowed from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

Self-centring Fear! how well thou canst ape Mercy!
 Too fond of slaughter!—matchless hypocrite!
 Thought Barrere so, when Brissot, Danton died?
 Thought Barrere so, when through the streaming streets
 Of Paris red-eyed Massacre o'er wearied
 Reel'd heavily, intoxicate with blood?
 And when (O heavens!) in Lyons' death-red square
 Sick fancy groan'd o'er putrid hills of slain,
 Didst thou not fiercely laugh, and bless the day?
 Why, thou hast been the mouth-piece of all horrors,
 And, like a blood-hound, crouch'd for murder! Now
 Aloof thou standest from the tottering pillar.
 (The Fall of Robespierre, I.168–79)

Robespierre's speech is an eloquent arrangement of such rhetorical devices as *apostrophe* (to 'Fear'), *erotema* ('thought Barrere so [...]'), *traductio prosonomasia* (the phonetic repetition in 'so' and 'Brissot', 'groan'd' and 'o'er'), and oxymoron ('reel'd heavily'). This partly substantiates the comments of Kessler and Holmes, but nonetheless their disparagement of the play as no more than 'rhetorical' and 'empty' is disputable. I posit that Coleridge's depiction of the French politicians is self-consciously ironic and hyperbolic. J.C.C. Mays acknowledges this possibility, detecting in the play 'a mixture of committed radicalism and sly humour'.²²

²⁰ Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 125.

²¹ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772–1804* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989; repr. Flamingo, 1999), p. 74.

²² *PW*, III.1, p. 9.

Similarly, William Jewett finds that Coleridge uses ‘Miltonisms’ as a means of ‘parodying and undermining [...] the stilted and anachronistic classicism of French political rhetoric.’²³ Therefore the characters’ ‘rhetorical’ speech and hollow citation of such Enlightenment principles as ‘Liberty, Conscience and Freedom’ parodies the politicians themselves, and also illustrates the tragic potential of France during the Reign of Terror. Vacuous, rhetorical monologue exists where productive discussion should, typifying the inability or unwillingness of the politicians to communicate with each other and demonstrating the dissolution of community.

That empty rhetoric can signify tragic discord is consistent with Gregory Dart’s claim that *The Fall of Robespierre* is ‘a modern version of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*’. Coleridge invokes Shakespeare’s play to insist that the events of the Terror are tragic and to emphasize the politicians’ own self-identification with the Roman republicans.²⁴ In *The Fall of Robespierre*, as in *Julius Caesar*, the varying implications of salient words in repetition characterize the government’s confused ideologies and indicate a political system in flux. Marvin Spevack observes that the word ‘constant’ occurs in various forms on 41 occasions in *Julius Caesar*.²⁵ To Caesar, ‘constant’ represents an impartial and firm observation of law (III.i.65). He associates himself with constancy to exalt his own wisdom, his ‘unassailable holds on his rank’ and his entitlement to rule (III.i.74). Brutus urges ‘formal constancy’ to mean stoical perseverance in purpose and disguise of intention, regardless of tiredness (II.i.237). Portia intimates that ‘constancy’ entails passion and suffering for loved ones, at slight variance from the repression of emotion that Brutus recommends (II.i.311). In Coleridge’s act of *The Fall of Robespierre*, the word ‘patriot’ undergoes similar variations. Robespierre’s brother indicates that the sections utter ‘patriot’ ironically in allusion to the sophistry by which Robespierre justifies his position as ‘*tyrant guardian of the country’s freedom*’ (I.111–12). To Couthon, ‘patriot’ implies ‘pomp’ (I.125). Robespierre himself understands a ‘virtuous patriot’ as one to whom violence is ‘light’; such a person will commit atrocity for the benefit of his country (I.156). The effect of such inconsistency is that ‘patriot’ varies sufficiently in its implications to become insignificant. Vague usage of this word weakens the foundations of revolutionary discourse. Thus Coleridge establishes rhetoric itself as a tragic theme in the drama.

Nicholas Roe cites ‘Coleridge’s perception of an underlying similarity between Robespierre and Godwin’ predicated upon resemblances between *Political Justice* (1793) and French revolutionary rhetoric.²⁶ This important connection is identified too by Paul Deschamps, who finds in *The Fall of Robespierre* that Coleridge

²³ ‘*The Fall of Robespierre* and the Sublime Machine of Agency’, p. 432.

²⁴ Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 171.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by Marvin Spevack, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; repr. 1989), p. 25.

²⁶ Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 219.

attacks not only the vacuity of political tenets in Robespierre's harsh regime, but also Godwin's advocacy of dispassionate reason. Deschamps identifies this as an Enlightenment tradition, which has been warped dangerously by the fanatical Robespierre and the unscrupulous Couthon, who disregard human life in pursuit of their ideals.²⁷ Coleridge expresses concern about the application of reason explicitly in a letter of 1794:

Reasoning is but *Words* unless where it derives force from the repeated experience of the person, to whom it is addressed.—How can we ensure their silence concerning *God &c*—? Is it possible, *they* should enter into our *motives* for this silence? If not we must produce their *obedience* by *Terror*. *Obedience? Terror?* The Repetition is sufficient—I need not inform you, that they are as inadequate as inapplicable.²⁸

Here Coleridge discusses pedagogical practices to impart a love of reason to children. Tragedy, to Coleridge, has an educative function. Yet *The Fall of Robespierre* risks becoming 'but *Words*', a reiteration of the principles it attacks rather than a critique of them. Hence it is necessary to relate the play's events to 'the repeated experience of the person[s], to whom it is addressed': the audience. This is accomplished using the character of Adelaide, the only fictitious character in *The Fall of Robespierre*. As a woman, Adelaide is excluded from participation in politics, but is thereby enabled as an external commentator on the politicians. In a dramatically simple scene that is tragically potent, Adelaide represents the experiences of the masses, and her lament marks the transition of *The Fall of Robespierre* from historical drama to tragedy.

The tropification that Coleridge uses in Adelaide's scene has an antecedent in *Hamlet*. A messenger informs Adelaide that Tallien has refused her letter, evoking the scene in which Hamlet declines to accept returned 'remembrances' from Ophelia (III.i.92). In both plays, the trope of failed delivery, symptomatic of a broader inability to communicate, prefigures lamentations of senselessness. From Hamlet's refusal to acknowledge his gifts and kind words, Ophelia infers that 'a noble mind is here o'erthrown' (III.i.148). This image of mental usurpation, coupled with Ophelia's recognition that Hamlet is 'th'expectancy and rose of the fair state', reveals that the prince's irrationality typifies a dysfunctional Danish court (III.i.150). Hence the later confusion and misapprehensions that cause the deaths of Polonius, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz and Gertrude. Similarly, in *The Fall of Robespierre*, Adelaide's frustrated correspondence with Tallien anticipates a complaint whose implication is expanded – beyond the inability of lovers to communicate – to a broader allegory, by which the concerns of representative figures of the 'father' and the 'mother' are disregarded. Ultimately, Adelaide depicts revolutionary France as a country that has abandoned reason:

²⁷ Paul Deschamps, *Le Formation de la Pensée de Coleridge* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1964), p. 348.

²⁸ *CL*, I, p. 120.

O this new freedom! at how dear a price
 We've bought the seeming good! The peaceful virtues
 And every blandishment of private life,
 The father's cares, the mother's fond endearment,
 All sacrificed to liberty's wild riot.
 The winged hours, that scatter'd roses around me,
 Languid and sad drag their slow course along,
 And shake big gall-drops from their heavy wings. (I.198–205)

Adelaide's speech recalls the tradition of the captive woman's lament, prevalent in Greek tragedy and particularly in the plays of Euripides, including *Helen*, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* and *The Suppliant Women*. In a survey of the mode Casey Dué cites the salient features of the woman's lament, which include a desperate tone and the contrast of a superior past with an unfortunate present state.²⁹ Repeatedly, Coleridge's view of his age is expressed in the mode of tragic lament.

Although the lament occurs in Old and Middle English literature, Coleridge's expertise in the mode is likely to be derived from his study of Classical, Elizabethan and neoclassical tragedy. The captive woman's lament enters English drama with the influence of Seneca, as John W. Cunliffe demonstrates.³⁰ As Zabina, the wife of Baiazeth in Christopher Marlowe's *The Conquests of Tamburlaine* (1587), longs for death, she bewails 'infamous monstrous slaveries' and the loss of 'the former triumphs of our mightiness' (V.ii.178, V.ii.189). In *Titus Andronicus*, Queen Tamora laments her bondage in Rome and the imminent death of her son, and petitions Titus for mercy (I.i.104–20). As Linda M. Austin demonstrates, 'a rhetoric of lamentation surfaced at the turn of the eighteenth century' for reasons that included the neoclassical revival of interest in ancient tragedy, and the compatibility of the lament with the emotional transport of the Romantic sublime.³¹ Austin's claim is borne out by the frequency with which the lament occurs in Romantic works, including Blake's *Book of Thel* (1789) and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Southey's 'A Lamentation' for Robert Emmet (1803), Shelley's 'Lament' and *Adonais* (1821), and Wordsworth's 'Lines Written in Early Spring' (1798), which culminates with the poet's defense of his reason to 'lament | What man has made of man' (ll. 23–4).³²

The mode of the lament recurs in Coleridge's *Osorio* (1797), in which Alhadra recalls captivity, imposed on her by the 'Holy Brethren', the Spanish Inquisition (I.i.206):

²⁹ Casey Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), pp. 10–14.

³⁰ John W. Cunliffe, *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy: An Essay*, repr. (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1925).

³¹ Linda M. Austin, 'The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53:3 (1998), 279–306 (p. 280).

³² See Scott Simpkins, "'The Book of Thel' and the Romantic Lament', *South Central Review*, 5:1 (1988), 25–9.

They cast me then a young and nursing Mother
 Into a dungeon of their Prison-house.
 There was no bed, no fire, no ray of Light,
 No touch, no sound of comfort! The black air—
 It was a toil to breathe it! I have seen
 The Gaoler's Lamp, the moment that he enter'd
 How the flame sunk at once down to the Socket.
 O miserable, by that Lamp to see
 My infant quarreling with the coarse hard bread
 Brought daily: for the little wretch was sickly,
 My rage had dried away it's natural food.
 In darkness I remain'd counting the clocks,
 Which haply told me that the blessed Sun
 Was rising on my garden.
 (*Osorio*, I.i.208–221)

Coleridge employs Adelaide and Alhadra to provide sympathetic referents for political contexts; both fictional characters translate historical events into sympathetic human terms to evoke the tragic. Adelaide's allusion to the sacrifice of 'the father's cares, the mother's fond endearment' personalizes the atrocities of the Terror. Adelaide shows that the family, the foundational unit of society, is under threat from violence committed in the name of freedom. With this risk to the structure of society, anarchy is possible.

Adelaide's desire for peace, evinced by her song and her critique of the Terror, has alienated her from politicians and the populace, whom she terms 'the tyrant's creatures' and 'th'enthusiast mob, confusion's lawless sons' respectively (I.244, I.249). Moreover, as Robespierre professes adherence to a Rousseauvian conception of general will, Adelaide's acknowledgement of discontentment reinforces her status as an outsider. As Carol Weber demonstrates, linguistic expression, particularly that of private feelings, was viewed with great suspicion in Revolutionary France.³³ Thus Adelaide violates social duty, although as Gregory Dart argues, the vagueness with which principles of Rousseau's *Social Contract* are invoked by the Revolutionaries does not offer a practical guide to civic behaviour in the Republic. This is another demonstration of the weakness of their rhetoric, and indicates that a primary cause of escalating violence is the lack of clear, legal demarcations of what constitutes dissent.³⁴ Adelaide is an outsider for her deviation from the supposed general-will, but Robespierre advocates this principle only ostensibly. In *Osorio*, Alhadra exemplifies the persecution of Muslims under Philip II and the Inquisition in sixteenth-century Spain. Like Adelaide, Alhadra is at risk from supporters of bogus ideologies: she explains that she has formerly been imprisoned on suspicion of heresy due to her 'complexion' (I.i.207).

³³ Caroline Weber, *Terror and its Discontents: Suspect Words in Revolutionary France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 17.

³⁴ Rousseau, *Robespierre and English Romanticism*, p. 19.

Contemporary comments on the laments in *The Fall of Robespierre* and *Osorio* indicate their transparency to their audiences: the laments are understood to be political, and their social commentary is transferable to Britain. Coleridge is not skilful enough a dramatist to embed this subtext into the plays subtly. In a letter of 1794 Coleridge admits that the character of Adelaide is overburdened as a medium for his own views; he terms her an ‘Automaton’.³⁵ A similar conclusion is reached concerning Alhadra by Coleridge’s friend George Bellas Greenough, who writes on a manuscript of *Osorio*, next to Alhadra’s lament, ‘Does not Alhadra account for this rather too philosophically?’³⁶ Likewise Coleridge’s dissent is apparent to modern scholars, who have tended to interpret Coleridge’s dramas politically since Carl Woodring’s study *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* (1961). The plays received further close attention, for example, in Nicholas Roe’s *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988). These critics examine the politics of dissent expressed through Adelaide and Alhadra, but how the characters achieve their effect dramatically also warrants evaluation. Jacqueline M. Labbe posits the sociological model of the possessive, masculine perspective termed the ‘prospect’ and its counterpart, the restricted, feminine locus of the ‘bower’. As the creative imagination attempts to traverse the gendered mental domains, Labbe discusses ‘the compelling fascination the bower holds as [male authors such as Coleridge] explore the complexities inherent in their attempted masculine appropriation of a symbol determinedly feminine.’³⁷ It is indicative of how many functions the character is made to fulfil that Coleridge’s Adelaide occupies both of the figurative positions Labbe posits. To soothe Tallien, Adelaide sings a hymn that Coleridge composed separately from the play as ‘Domestic Peace’, a song of the bower:

In cottag’d vale she dwells
Listn’ing to the Sabbath bells! (I.220–21)

However, Adelaide’s lament is delivered from a prospect of broad political observation that encompasses both urban disorder and domestic impact. The sense of authorial ventriloquism is accentuated by her complaint that ‘the winged hours [...] shake big gall-drops from their heavy wings’, whose language and symbolism is not delivered in the same voice as the optimistic and naïve hymn. Similarly, in *Osorio* our suspension of disbelief is jeopardized by the intrusion of Coleridge’s religious views when Alhadra departs from the misery of her incarceration to make general comments about Christians: ‘they never do pardon—tis their Faith!’ (I.i.202). Alhadra is slightly more skilfully crafted than Adelaide is; Coleridge’s political complaints are encoded in a credible narrative of individual female experience, although she too is without discernible character outside of her lamentation.

³⁵ *CL*, I, p. 125.

³⁶ Quoted in *PW*, III.1, p. 153.

³⁷ Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), p. 96.

Despite Coleridge's demonstrable intuition of how female characters might be used to relate the social constraints of their historical contexts, Adelaide and Alhadra illustrate his persistent problems with female characterization. This shortcoming is evident also in his readings of tragedy. In 1813 the *Bristol Gazette* reports Coleridge's comments on women in Shakespeare's plays:

Speaking of the character of the women of Shakespear, or rather as Pope stated, the absence of character, Mr. Coleridge said this was the highest compliment that could be paid to them: the elements were so commixed, so even was the balance of feeling that no one protruded in particular.³⁸

There is a parallel in *The Piccolomini*, in a passage that Coleridge translates literally from Schiller, in which Thekla meditates on her perceived worthlessness without Max: 'What was I | Ere his fair love infused a soul into me?' (II.vii.83–4). Coleridge repeats the critical point in 1819:

In all the Shakespearian women there is essentially the same foundation and principle; the distinct individuality and variety are merely the result of the modification of circumstances, whether in Miranda the maiden, in Imogen the wife, or in Katherine the queen.³⁹

It is under such a belief that Coleridge creates Adelaide and Alhadra; he denies women personality traits with the consequence that they become blank canvases for his own philosophies. Yet it is noticeable in the above lecture that Coleridge avoids the more complex of Shakespeare's female characters. He does not mention the madness of Ophelia, the excessive honesty of Cordelia, nor Lady Macbeth's 'unsex me here' invocation of evil (*Macbeth* I.v.39). Nor does Coleridge refer to the male figures in Shakespeare's works, from clowns to messengers, who are functional and relatively characterless in the manner he associates solely with women. By contrast, in notes for a lecture of 1819, Coleridge writes that 'the ancients knew no way of making their women interesting but by unsexualizing them, Medea, Electra.'⁴⁰ Perhaps it is only at this point in his career that Coleridge realizes that women onstage can be 'interesting', although he never learns to write women well. I think Julie A. Carlson is correct in her assessment that Coleridge's eventual solution to his inability to write women is to masculinize them, as in the later play *Zapolya*.⁴¹ Carlson's apt observations on the characters of Sarolta and Glycine in *Zapolya* lead me to regret that she does not address the character of Adelaide to provide a complete study of how Coleridge's depiction of women develops.

³⁸ Quoted in *LoL*, I, pp. 555–6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 270.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 409.

⁴¹ Julie A. Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 121–5.

Despite my criticisms of how the character is formed, I think that Adelaide is the belletrist of *The Fall of Robespierre*. In *Danton's Death* (1835), Georg Büchner departs from historical sources to invent a new, brutal speech for St Just, which is superfluous when placed with the similar dialogue he obtains from transcripts. I find that Coleridge's characterization of Adelaide is a more effective mode of fictionalizing the repercussions of the Terror. Had Coleridge and Southey written the entire play together – rather than leaving each to compose his own portion – and retained Adelaide throughout, I think the drama would be greatly improved. Adelaide is the only sympathetic, human referent for the 'empty tokens' of Revolutionary oration and the brutality of the Terror. With Adelaide the historic events become palpable and tragic.

Like *The Fall of Robespierre*, the 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' ostensibly takes as its subject the death of an eminent person, but Coleridge assigns to it tragic significance by his relation of individual failure to broader social problems. The 'Monody' too achieves this purpose with fictional elements and a sustained tone of lamentation. This is most salient in the text from 1794, whose modifications Coleridge conducted in the months after his composition of *The Fall of Robespierre* with Southey. Coleridge's treatment of Thomas Chatterton's death in his 'Monody' departs from what John Axcelson terms 'the tragedy of Chatterton himself' towards the 'symbol of Chatterton as tragedy'.⁴² The former state refers to a certain dominant mode of presenting Chatterton; 'to keep him a boy', as David Fairer observes, and to 'shut off his politico-satirical side and exploit the lyricism and sentiment instead'.⁴³ This abstraction of Chatterton's youth, literary achievement and melancholy death gives rise to Wordsworth's 'marvellous boy' and to Keats's 'child of sorrow' and 'son of misery' ('Resolution and Independence', l. 43; 'To Chatterton', l. 2). The premature death of Chatterton qualifies him as the representative of a 'Romantic cult of youth', as Linda Kelly opines wryly: 'Death had given him charms that he would never have had in life. Cast in the role of the victim he had become a symbol of the isolation and incomprehension that the poet must suffer.'⁴⁴ In Chatterton's isolation, and the implication in the 'Monody' that the populace lacks representation, Coleridge's tragic motif of ideological imprisonment recurs, continuing his preoccupation with the theme of restricted expression.

While Coleridge's 'Monody' is inflected with the same anxiety of a poet who identifies himself with his unfortunate subject, versions of the poem from 1794 onwards articulate a relationship to Chatterton that differs from Wordsworth's and Keats's significantly. Rather than employing the image of Chatterton as solitary

⁴² John Axcelson, 'Saving Chatterton: Imagining Historical Transmissions in Coleridge', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 36:3 (2005), 126–33 (p. 126).

⁴³ David Fairer, 'Chatterton's Poetic Afterlife: A Context for Coleridge's *Monody*', in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. by Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 228–52 (p. 229).

⁴⁴ Linda Kelly, *The Marvellous Boy: The Life and Myth of Thomas Chatterton* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 84.

poet to shut off his 'politico-satirical side', Coleridge exploits the radical themes of Chatterton's poetry to express his own social concerns. In the description of Chatterton's suicide Coleridge emphasizes that he is a subversive figure:

CARE, of wither'd brow,
Prepar'd the poison's death-cold power:
Already to thy lips was rais'd the bowl. (68–70)

Chatterton was believed to have committed suicide rather than poisoned himself accidentally. Coleridge depicts him as a passive figure, evoking Socrates' acceptance of the bowl of hemlock. Chatterton's suicide as re-enactment of Socrates' implies a resignation to civic pressure rather than melancholy: the 30 tyrants who had seized control of Athens demanded Socrates' sham trial and death. Additionally, Chatterton's death repeats the expulsion of wisdom signified by Socrates' death sentence.

Socrates provides a useful model for Coleridge's presentation of Chatterton as a potential benefactor to mankind. The poem's establishment of Chatterton as a literary, and specifically a British, tragic figure is predicated upon a complex system of invocation and the assumption of masks. Coleridge becomes Chatterton, and Chatterton becomes his own Ælla/Ella. Rather than preserving Chatterton as an abstract figure for contemplation, Coleridge wishes to summon his subject in reality: 'still I view | Thy corse of livid hue' (19–20). The invocative tone of the poem's opening stanzas echoes Chatterton's summons of Ælla to inspire his tribute: 'Let this my Songe bolde as thy Courage bee | As everlastinge to Posterytie' ('Songe to Ella' (1768), ll. 3–4). Donald S. Taylor perceives the narrator of the 'Songe' as 'an adulatory speaker who feels his own need for the spirit that moved Ella [...] then feels still more urgently the need of the city for Ella's courage and prowess'.⁴⁵

Equally, Taylor could be describing Coleridge's invocation of Chatterton, an act whose success is indicated by Chatterton's manifestation in the present rather than the past tense from the fifth stanza of the 'Monody' onward: 'he hastes along' (35). The conventional idiomatic comparison of pen to sword allows Chatterton to assume the identity of Ælla, the champion of liberty: 'her own iron rod he makes Oppression feel' (48). Four lines place particular emphasis on Chatterton/Ælla as a social figure whose loss is tragic:

Friend to the friendless, to the sick man health,
With generous joy he views th' *ideal* wealth;
He hears the widow's heaven-breath'd prayer of praise;
He marks the shelter'd orphan's tearful gaze. (41–4)

Ælla's suicide in *Ælla: A Tragycal Enterlude; or Discourseynge Tragedy* (1769) assists comparison of the character with Chatterton himself, but the implication

⁴⁵ Donald S. Taylor, *Thomas Chatterton's Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 110.

that Chatterton's Wilkite politics and locally controversial character attacks in verse are equivalent to the violent heroism of Ælla is unpersuasive. Similarly, the depiction of the solitary poet Chatterton as 'friend to the friendless' seems unlikely; this is because the lines were not actually composed for Chatterton. With little modification, Coleridge takes the passage from an 'Epistle' that he reports inscribing on the window-shutters of an inn that was once home to John Kyrle (1637–1724), known to Coleridge as the 'Man of Ross', in July 1794.⁴⁶ Hence, the 1794 'Monody' adapts Chatterton to a pre-existent anxiety that community lacks representation, and so revives a central theme of *The Fall of Robespierre*.

As in *The Fall of Robespierre* and *Osorio*, Coleridge blends fact and fiction to evoke tragic pathos in the 'Monody' in order to foreground his political concerns; Adelaide, Chatterton and Alhadra each become an 'Automaton' for Coleridge's dissent. Throughout 1794, Coleridge continues to seek a champion for liberty where Kyrle, Chatterton and Robespierre have failed. Thomas Erskine, who attempted to have the treason charges against The London Twelve dropped by acting as their defence consul, is the subject of one of Coleridge's poems in his series of *Sonnets on Eminent Characters*. The poem, published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1794, places pressure on Erskine to become immortalized in memory as a hero, evoking the *pietas* of Aeneas, thereby creating a Republican subtext, with his use of religious language:

dreadless thou didst stand
(Thy censer glowing with the hallow'd flame)
An hireless Priest before th' insulted shrine.
(*'To the Hon Mr Erskine'*, ll. 4–6)

Erskine will be venerated for his 'stream divine | Of unmatch'd eloquence', but there is no indication of potential achievement following his bravery (7–8). Instead, the poem's closing image of the posthumous hero's stellar radiance intimates glorious failure rather than progress. Similarly, Coleridge assumes a tone of lamentation as he depicts the Polish revolutionary Thaddeus Kosciuszko (1746–1817) as a martyr to the cause of freedom from Russia and Prussia:

O what a loud and fearful shriek was there,
As tho' a thousand souls one death-groan pour'd!
Ah me! they view'd beneath an hireling's sword
Fall'n KOSKIUSKO!
(*'Sonnet: To Kosciusko'*, ll. 1–4)

Coleridge describes the site of the rebel's death as 'the dirge of murder'd Hope', but in fact Kosciuszko had not been killed, but merely wounded and captured (8). Although Coleridge later modified the sonnet stylistically, it remains factually erroneous in four editions of his poems in which it appears during his lifetime, the last in 1834 and long after any misconception about Kosciuszko's death could

⁴⁶ CL, I, p. 87.

have been unnoticed by a person so interested in his career. Evidently Coleridge tolerates, and occasionally requires, factual inaccuracy in the evocation of tragic pathos.

The sonnets on Erskine and Kosciusko articulate unsuccessful genius, like the disappointments of Robespierre and Chatterton, and beg the question of what solution is available to humanity. Tragic reality serves as propaganda to Coleridge, whose literary works and correspondence in 1794 imply repeatedly that the answer to civilization's difficulties might be a society founded upon newly defined humanitarian principles. Coleridge's critiques of contemporary civilization in 1794 are always mindful of Pantisocracy, the system of self-government that he and Southey intended to establish on the banks of the Susquehanna. Thus, while the lamentation of Adelaide, the 'Monody', the lines on the Man of Ross, and the sonnets on Erskine and Kosciusko pose questions of how true liberty can be achieved, and how change can be implemented where great men fail, Pantisocracy has its ghostly presence in all of these texts as an answer. Where politicians fail, the abolition of government is implied. If people are made poor Coleridge plans aspheterism, the eradication of private property. Thus the tragic is articulated as a stimulant, as Coleridge's inspiration to devise a means of social improvement, and a mode that he hopes will encourage others to do likewise.

In 1795, Coleridge's use of tragedy to attack Pitt's government becomes more explicit and earnest, particularly in response to the two 'Gagging Acts' of November 1795, which prohibited congregations of more than 50 people and deemed treasonous any publication that was critical of the government or the monarch. To these acts Coleridge replies with a published lecture, *The Plot Discovered, or an Address to the People Against Ministerial Treason*, which owes its title to Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved; or, A Plot Discovered* (1682). The association of Pitt's cabinet with Otway's play, in which a suspected conspiracy is found to have been fabricated by governmental conspirators, is an attack on the legitimacy of the 'Gagging Acts'. Coleridge suggests that the supporters of the Acts must necessarily be untrustworthy. Additionally, Lewis Patton and Peter Mann suggest that Coleridge's title refers to the arrest, in May 1794, of The London Twelve, to imply that 'the danger to be feared is not from Thelwall and his allies but from the very ones who cry out against plots, i.e. Pitt and his ministers, who conspire against the rights of Englishmen.'⁴⁷

As in his depictions of the isolated Adelaide and Chatterton, Coleridge's lectures articulate his concerns that the masses lack representation as tragic. The government's error, Coleridge states, is that the 'King is regarded as the voice and will of the people.'⁴⁸ This discussion of a people silenced culminates in a quotation from Euripides' *The Suppliant Women* in which Theseus, king of Athens, explains that freedom of speech benefits society, translated thus: 'Liberty speaks in these words: —Who with good counsel for his city wishes to address

⁴⁷ *Lects 1795*, p. 283n.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

this gathering? | Anyone who wishes to do this gains distinction; whoever does not keeps silent.’⁴⁹ The quotation serves two purposes. Ostensibly, it demonstrates that while Coleridge fears the tyranny of politicians, he also believes that the masses’ inability to participate in politics might result in the mental atrophy of the populace. This, to Coleridge, is catastrophic, as it is to ignorance that he attributes the outbreak of violence in France.⁵⁰ The danger is domestic because, Coleridge claims, the government conspires to maintain widespread ignorance in England and Ireland in order that their people might work like beasts.⁵¹ The second function of the quotation from Euripides is that it assists Coleridge’s self-identification with another dissenting tragedian: Milton uses the same lines from *The Suppliant Women* as the epigram to his *Areopagitica: A speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing to the parliament of England* (1644). In Coleridge’s lecture he also uses a quotation from *Samson Agonistes* to imply that the collapse of French society should warn England:

With horrible convulsion to and fro,
They tugg’d, they shook—till down they came and drew
The whole Roof after them with burst of Thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,
Lords, Ladies, Captains, Counsellors, and Priests,
Their choice Nobility!
(*Samson Agonistes*, ll. 1649–54, var.)

Coleridge implies that the blind Samson represents not a figure of authority, but the average citizen. This is typical of Coleridge’s tragic poems and plays, whose referents are not always the rulers and heroes of tragic tradition, but figures of lower social status, such as Adelaide and Alhadra. Geoffrey Brereton claims that this is a characteristic of modern tragedy, in which ‘the characters can be scaled down considerably without becoming non-tragic’, and the tragic protagonist ‘can be described as a “quite ordinary” man [...] raised to tragic stature by virtue of the situation in which he finds himself.’⁵² This tragedy of ‘scaled down’ protagonists accords with Coleridge’s anticipation of a revolution that will yield an egalitarian society. Raymond Williams implies that the liberal politics of the Romantic period cause the ‘extension of the tragic category to a newly rising class’:

Its eventual effect was profound. As in other bourgeois revolutions, extending the categories of law or suffrage, the arguments for the limited extension became inevitable arguments for a general extension. The extension from the prince to the citizen became in practice an extension to all human beings.⁵³

⁴⁹ Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, in *Electra and Other Plays*, trans. by John Davie, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 106.

⁵⁰ *Lects* 1795, p. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵² Geoffrey Brereton, *Principles of Tragedy: A Rational Examination of the Tragic Concept in Life and Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 18.

⁵³ *Modern Tragedy*, p. 49.

Without the benefit of hindsight by which later commentators such as Williams identify that the Revolution primarily advanced 'bourgeois' interests, the egalitarian principles he perceives in the French Revolution allow Coleridge to include all people in the domain of the tragic, including most importantly the social benefits that he hopes will follow strife. But as Coleridge becomes disillusioned with the French Revolution, and abandons Necessitarianism, he reverses his political application of the tragic. Coleridge no longer employs the mode to offer consolation for the hardships of a revolution he endorses, but to caution against insurrection.

Conservative Tragedy

Coleridge's abandonment of radical politics is undeniable but, as Peter Kitson observes, 'it is not easy to date the beginning of Coleridge's passage from idiosyncratic dissenter to idiosyncratic conservative.'⁵⁴ The attempt to assess Coleridge's politics is complicated by his reluctance to commit to the policies of any one party. In 1801 he complains that 'my heart swelled so within me at the brutal Ignorance & Hardheartedness of all Parties alike.'⁵⁵ While Coleridge's philosophical passage from radical to conservative may elude specification, he does signal the transition explicitly in public. With this change, Coleridge's use of the tragic alters also: he evokes the mode with different emphases, for political purposes that are conservative rather than radical. Coleridge's public attitude to France is markedly different following the French defeat of the Swiss at Berne in 1798, and it is with this demonstrative shift that he announces his new political position. The French victory was indicative of a force that aspired to build an empire, and was incompatible with the humanitarian principles that Coleridge had formerly admired in Revolutionary discourse.

Either from a progressive sentiment that the French have betrayed his faith in the Revolution –culminating with the French attack on Switzerland – or from a sense of social obligation to refute his former allegiance, Coleridge becomes critical of France in 1798. Thereafter he dismisses his previous support of the Revolution as erroneous. In 'France: An Ode', first published in the *Morning Post* under the revelatory title of 'The Recantation', Coleridge attacks French foreign policy:

O FRANCE! that mockest Heav'n, adult'rous, blind,
And patient only in pernicious toils,
Was this thy boast, champion of human kind!
To mix with Monarchs in the lust of sway,
Yell in the hunt, and share the murd'rous prey—
T' insult the shrine of Liberty with spoils
From freemen torn! to tempt and to betray!
(*'France: An Ode'*, ll. 78–84)

⁵⁴ Peter Kitson, 'Political Thinker', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. by Lucy Newlyn, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 156–69 (p. 164).

⁵⁵ *CL*, II, p. 711.

Coleridge's recantation is necessary because, he claims, the task of France was not to conquer, but to 'persuade the nations to be free' (l. 61). In 'Fears in Solitude: Written in April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion', Coleridge's disappointment develops into an apprehension that England will be invaded, and that it is a fate that is deserved as retribution for Britain's war on France: 'Therefore, evil days | Are coming on us, O my countrymen!' ('Fears in Solitude', ll. 124–5). 'The Story of the Mad Ox', although a humorous account of the French Revolution and the reaction of the British Opposition, indicates serious concerns about the political chaos of Europe. This instability is evident in the pursuit of the ox, which represents the French, by an English parson and his clergy, the subsequent flight of the mob as the devil sits astride the ox, and the conclusive interruption of the narrative with (incorrect) news of Pitt's injury in a duel.

While his earlier tragic writings urge political action, Coleridge displays a fear of political upheaval in works following *Osorio*. This new tragic emphasis is informed not only by Coleridge's interest in international affairs in newspapers, but by literal, physical changes in perspective. Coleridge's new caution is evident in his withdrawal from prominence as a dissenter, but also in his domestic relocation from the politically volatile Bristol to the quietness of Nether Stowey, and subsequently Germany and Keswick. These changes allow Coleridge to form detached opinions on British politics. Regina Hewitt depicts Wordsworth and Coleridge as proto-sociologists who turn from radicalism due to a realization of 'the limited place of politics in a larger social system' to observe society and understand its operation instead.⁵⁶ The conservative-tragic position, as explained by René Girard, is that to threaten the structure of society invites chaos and catastrophe. Girard writes that 'order, peace and fecundity depend on cultural distinctions; it is not these distinctions but the loss of them that gives birth to fierce rivalries and sets members of the same family or social group against one another.'⁵⁷

Even 'bloodless' revolution would require a total upheaval of society to bring about Coleridge's system of Pantisocracy, and it is evident that this could not occur without disorder. Girard encapsulates his point with a passage from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* in which Ulysses indicates the dangerous consequences of the loss of 'degree' or social status:

O, when degree is shaken,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,

⁵⁶ Regina Hewitt, *The Possibilities of Society: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Sociological Viewpoint of English Romanticism*, The Margins of Literature (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 45.

⁵⁷ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: The Athlone Press, 1988; repr. Continuum, 2005), p. 52.

Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
 But by degree, stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And, hark, what discord follows.
 (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.102–11)

Dionysian wildness can only be resolved by the merciless, corrective actions of Apollo; to invite further catastrophe than already exists would be folly. Hence, Coleridge begins to use the tragic to warn against revolutionary change, not to incite it. In particular I want to examine a period in 1802 when Coleridge devoted considerable interest to Greek tragedy.

In August 1802 Coleridge writes to William Sotheby in anticipation of a copy of *Orestes*, Sotheby's version of Euripides' *Electra*: 'The newest subject—tho' brought from the Planets (or *Asteroids*) Ceres & Pallas, could not excite my curiosity more than *Orestes*.' Coleridge suggests that Sotheby writes a new tragedy on the character of Medea, to be based, it seems from the letter, on Seneca's play:

There is a subject of great merit in the ancient mythology hitherto untouched—I believe so at least—but for the *mode* of the Death which mingled the ludicrous & horrible, but which might be easily altered, it is one of the finest subjects for Tragedy that I am acquainted with—Medea after the murder of her children fled to the Court of the old King, Pelias, was regarded with superstitious Horror, & shunned or insulted by the Daughters of Pelias—till hearing of her miraculous Restoration of Æson they conceived the idea of recalling by her means the youth of their own Father. She avails herself of their credulity—& so works them up by pretended magic Rites, and that they consent to kill their Father in his sleep, & throw him into the magical Cauldron—which done, Medea leaves them with bitter Taunts & triumph.⁵⁸

Coleridge proceeds to quote from Medea's letter of lamentation to Jason in Ovid's *Heroides*. He reiterates Ovid's rhetorical question on the relevance of Medea's tale, and why one should revive the story of Pelias' daughters, who wound their father innocently by their devotion, and hack his limbs with virgin hands:

Quid referam Peliae natas pietate nocentes
 caesaque virginea membra paterna manu?
 (Ovid, *Heroides* XII.129–30)

The answer, Coleridge implies, is the continued relevance of tragic art to reality. The letter to Sotheby not only reveals literary influences on Coleridge's Buttermere articles, but evinces a method of articulating the tragic that is evident in Coleridge's continuation of 'The Three Graves', his *Wallenstein* translation from Schiller's German, and his account of Maria Eleonora Schöning's death in *The Friend*. While the prose plot-summary of the proposed tragedy conforms to

⁵⁸ CL, II, p. 857.

the pattern of morality that I find in other of Coleridge's texts, his absorption in *Medea* in particular marks works that are contemporaneous with his response to Sotheby's *Orestes*.

In October 1802 'Dejection: An Ode' was first published. The poem articulates Coleridge's melancholy over Wordsworth's imminent marriage, his own marital dissatisfaction, and his infatuation with Sara Hutchinson. As such, the scope of the poem is not of tragic magnitude. Yet I think George Dekker is right to claim that a version of tragic catharsis occurs at a personal level in which 'the experience of tragic art mediates, so far as mediation is possible, between the polar extremes of feelingful Joy or feelingless Dejection.'⁵⁹ Furthermore, 'Dejection' rehearses the playing out of tragic forces, which also impel a series of articles Coleridge wrote the same month on the seduction of a local innkeeper.

In October 1802, Mary Robinson, a waitress at her parents' inn, married 'a Gentleman, calling himself Alexander Augustus Hope, Member for Linlithgowshire, and brother to the Earl of Hopeton.'⁶⁰ Within weeks of the wedding, the bridegroom was revealed to be an impostor, a bigamist and a forger named Hatfield. Convicted of forgery, Hatfield was hanged at Carlisle in September 1803. Coleridge wrote a series of articles on the deception for the *Morning Post* and the *Courier* in 1802. Ostensibly Coleridge's pieces on the scandal by the shore of Buttermere are typical human-interest journalism, but they also articulate his anxieties about tension in Europe, and the overall approach is derived from his recent reflection on the doomed love of Jason and Medea.

As I place Coleridge's prose treatment of the Buttermere scandal within his tragic vision, I wish also to juxtapose it with Wordsworth's account in *The Prelude*. On a visit to London, Wordsworth learns that Mary Robinson's story has been adapted for the stage. The poet complains in the 1805 version that it is a 'too holy theme for such a place' (*The Prelude*, VII.318). In the 1850 text Wordsworth modifies his claim; the theatre is too 'light' a medium; popular melodrama is unsuitable for the presentation of such serious experiences as Mary's (VII.295). Wordsworth addresses Coleridge in the 1805 version, and outlines the incident:

I mean, O distant Friend! a Story drawn
From our own ground, the Maid of Buttermere,
And how the Spoiler came, 'a bold bad Man'
To God unfaithful, Children, Wife, and Home,
And wooed the artless Daughter of the hills,
And wedded her, in cruel mockery
Of love and marriage bonds. (VII.321–7)

Mary Robinson's experience is personal to Wordsworth: 'we were nursed, as almost might be said, | On the same mountains' (VII.342–3). Ernest de Selincourt's detection of an allusion to Milton's *Lycidas* in these lines indicates that Mary has

⁵⁹ George Dekker, *Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility* (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1978), p. 231.

⁶⁰ *EoT*, I, p. 357.

been absorbed into the Lake District as a source of inspiration for Wordsworth. Her tale forms part of the myth of the philosopher-poet's mental development.⁶¹ By contrast, Coleridge renders the incident tragic with insistence that its importance is not solely personal but public and exemplary; thus in discussions of the same subject the two authors demonstrate the philosophical differences of their responses to misfortune.

Coleridge's first article on the Buttermere episode appears in the *Morning Post* of 11 October 1802 under the title of 'Romantic Marriage'. At the time of publication it was not known that Hatfield was an impostor, but there were suspicions about his identity in the Kewswick community. Hence, Coleridge's piece assumes an ambiguous method that will allow it to be read retrospectively as tragic if Hatfield is found to be a fraud, but as romantic if he is not. This technique is predicated on the presentation of Mary. Initially, Coleridge dispels the popular conception of Mary's great beauty: 'she is rather gap-toothed, and somewhat pock-fretten.'⁶² Here Coleridge agrees with De Quincey, who recalls that '*beautiful*, in any emphatic sense, she was not.' De Quincey also comments that Mary is ill-tempered, and that admiration of her 'roused mere anger and disdain'.⁶³ However, despite his recommendation that Mary might be better known as 'the *Grace* of Buttermere, rather than the Beauty', Coleridge decides that it better suits his purpose of evoking pathos to present Mary as a remarkably attractive woman.⁶⁴ Hence in the same paragraph he claims that she 'has long attracted the notice of every visitor by her exquisite elegance, and the becoming manner in which she is used to fillet her beautiful long hair.' Subsequently, Coleridge refers to Mary Robinson as 'the beauty of Buttermere' four times in the same article without irony. For the same purpose Coleridge notes that Mary's parents are 'old' and 'poor' and, in contradiction of De Quincey's remarks on Mary's ill temper, Coleridge states that his subject has 'an irreproachable character'.⁶⁵

By the time of Coleridge's next four articles on the Buttermere scandal, Hatfield had been confirmed as an impostor.⁶⁶ Coleridge recognizes in his own view of the episode a resemblance to a viewer of art, and conceives of his treatment of Hatfield's story as *ekphrasis*, a 'novel of real life' on 22 October.⁶⁷ Subsequently, in a notebook entry Coleridge claims that 'Hatfield—Cruikshank—Πηνελοπη' will be 'characters in my novel.'⁶⁸ In journalism Coleridge sets about defining

⁶¹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The 1805 Text*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford Standard Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 282.

⁶² *EoT*, I, p. 357.

⁶³ *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. by Grevel Lindop and others, 21 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000–2003), X (2003), ed. by Alina Clej, p. 316.

⁶⁴ *EoT*, I, p. 61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 357–8, my italics.

⁶⁶ The last two of these articles were reprinted in the *Courier* on 12 November 1802 and 1 January 1803 respectively.

⁶⁷ *EoT*, I, p. 374.

⁶⁸ *CN*, I, § 1395.

Mary and Hatfield in tragic opposition, as simplified characters that represent good and evil. Scandalously, Hatfield ‘paid serious addresses to four women at the same time,’ ‘made light’ of his charge with forgery, and ‘never attended the church at Keswick but once.’⁶⁹ In a letter of 1804 Coleridge explains that such a wrongdoer is a chameleon: ‘There are HATFIELDS—& likewise there are IAGOS—Whatever shape Vice can assume, Virtue will counterfeit.’⁷⁰ The word ‘counterfeit’ is used by Milton to describe the disguised Satan’s infiltration of heaven, and equates Hatfield not only with Iago but with the arch-fiend (*Paradise Lost*, IV.117). This is appropriate for Coleridge’s hyperbolic summation of Hatfield’s correspondence: ‘never surely did an equal number of letters disclose a thicker swarm of villainies perpetrated by one of the worst, and miseries inflicted on some of the best, of human beings.’⁷¹

Coleridge insists on the Buttermere episode’s importance: ‘I cannot express the sincere concern, that every inhabitant in the country takes in the misfortune of poor Mary.’⁷² By broadening the scope of the incident from Mary’s life to imply that the entire nation is affected, Coleridge presents Hatfield’s crime as a phallic intrusion to spoil a virgin community rather than the deception of one woman alone; Hatfield’s actions are invasive. Coleridge exploits this sense of betrayed community to elevate the Buttermere incident to tragedy: ‘Poor Mary is the object of universal concern.’⁷³

Jerome Christensen indicates that Coleridge’s journalism on the Buttermere scandal is permeated by a fear that the Peace of Amiens would be short-lived; that the eruption of scandal in a rural idyll prefigures the resumption of war that Coleridge fears. As Christensen indicates, the tentative Peace of Amiens creates an uneasy atmosphere in which Hatfield’s assumed and symbolic name of ‘Hope’ becomes ‘a misnomer or an alias for something that should in fact be feared’, forbidding political optimism.⁷⁴ There are resonances of personal issues too: as Coleridge’s articles were written shortly after Wordsworth’s wedding, it is possible to detect irony in Coleridge’s departure from the title of ‘Romantic Marriage’ at the expense of his colleague.

The xenophobic wariness of Coleridge’s treatment of the Buttermere scandal reflects a fear that catastrophe occurs as a consequence of violations of ‘degree’ or social order. Hatfield, a newcomer to Keswick, is the object of Coleridge’s suspicion even prior to confirmation of his crimes. Like Medea and Orestes, the newcomer Hatfield is inherently threatening. If Hatfield is, as he claims, Alexander Augustus Hope, his intended marriage to the lowly Mary transcends

⁶⁹ *EoT*, I, pp. 374–5, 409.

⁷⁰ *CL*, II, p. 1121.

⁷¹ *EoT*, I, p. 415.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

⁷⁴ Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 135.

class structures in a manner that alarms Coleridge. When Medea, a princess, arrives in Corinth, her status is lowered to that of a barbarian, and Jason's desire to marry a Corinthian princess initiates the tragedy of Euripides' play. In Sotheby's (and all versions of) *Orestes*, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus' attempt to assume monarchical control through adultery and murder brings further catastrophe. Hence, in order to accept Hope's marriage to Mary Robinson, Coleridge seeks to negate their class division. He accomplishes this, in anticipation of his own *Zapolya* (1817), with an unsubstantiated suggestion that Mary is of noble origin: 'It seems that there are some circumstances attending her birth and *true parentage*, which would account for her striking superiority in mind, and manners.'⁷⁵ As Hope is actually an impostor, he has attempted to violate the social order, and catastrophe follows. Similarly, both in the continuation of 'The Three Graves' and Coleridge's translations of *Wallenstein*, tragedy arises from the defiance of authority, and transgressions of 'degree' are committed. In the ballad, Mary's mother desires her daughter's lover, and in the *Wallenstein* plays, the eponym refuses the Emperor's orders to return his war-weary army to battle.

Coleridge uses the occult, by which natural law is transcended, to accentuate the violation of social order that occurs in 'The Three Graves' and *Wallenstein*, recalling Medea's association with witchcraft. In Coleridge's portion of the ballad, the effects of the mother's curse are seen, and she utters a second imprecation on Ellen. The curses succeed due to the confusion of natural order. As a mother should be virtuous, it is assumed that her prayers will be answered, as she should not pray for what is not just:

Beneath the foulest Mother's curse
 No child could ever thrive:
 A Mother is a Mother still,
 The holiest thing alive.
 ('Continuation of *The Three Graves*', ll. 37–40)

Wordsworth complains that Coleridge's tragic elaboration of the tale renders it unpalatable: 'he made it too shocking and painful, and not sufficiently sweetened by any healing views.'⁷⁶ Coleridge makes comparable alterations in his translations from Schiller. In the context of a religious war, Wallenstein's preoccupation with astrology and the supernatural signifies his deviation from the will of the Holy Roman Emperor. In Coleridge's version of *The Piccolomini*, he expands one of Wallenstein's soliloquies with an implication that his refusal to follow orders is directly related to his occult interests:

No road, no track behind me, but a wall,
 Impenetrable, insurmountable,

⁷⁵ *EoT*, I, p. 376, my italics.

⁷⁶ Barron Field, *Memoirs of Wordsworth*, ed. by Geoffrey Little (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), p. 100.

Rises obedient to the spells I mutter'd
And meant not—my own doings tower behind me.
(*The Piccolomini*, IV.iv.22–5)

As in 'The Three Graves', the folly of occult interests signals the character's unnatural desires, which threaten the structure of society. Thus, Coleridge builds on the magical aspects of Schiller's play to make a judgment of Wallenstein as a historical character and to emphasize that he is tragically misguided.

Coleridge's depiction of Wallenstein's decline also foretells the downfall of Napoleon, about whom Coleridge contributed a series of articles for the *Morning Post* in March 1800, when he also translated Schiller's plays. Coleridge complains in a marginal note on his manuscript that Wallenstein, lacking 'Strength', is 'not tragic': 'Schiller has drawn weakness [...] hence W[allenstein] evaporates in mock-mysterious speeches.' To add the quality of 'Strength', to imply that Wallenstein is admirable, and therefore that his downfall is a tragic loss, Coleridge explains that he 'forms a character of Buonaparte', with the result, he claims, that Schiller's version is 'a little *improved*':⁷⁷

A youth who had scarce seen his twentieth year
Was Wallenstein, when he and I were friends:
Yet even then he was a daring soul:
His frame of mind was serious and severe
Beyond his years; his dreams were of great objects.
(*The Death of Wallenstein*, III.ii.98–102)

The anxiety of political upheaval that persists in Coleridge's versions of the *Wallenstein* plays expresses his desire that the French monarchy should be restored without the violence of 'a revolution of property'. Like Wallenstein, Napoleon is 'a man of various talent, of commanding genius, of splendid exploit.'⁷⁸ Additionally, Coleridge's fear that Napoleon possesses an impractical idealism informs his depiction of the indecisive Wallenstein:

[Napoleon] has hitherto supported the part of a man ambitious of greatness: too intensely preoccupied to be otherwise than austere in morals; too confident in his predestined fortune to be suspicious or cruel; too ambitious of a new greatness for the ordinary ambition of conquest or despotism.⁷⁹

To his death Wallenstein dismisses evidence of his imminent fall. He places his faith in prophecies of his 'predestined future'. Coleridge's depiction of Wallenstein as a version of Napoleon implies that his opponent, the Holy Roman Emperor, represents Pitt. Both Napoleon and Wallenstein make 'pacific overtures' but fail to secure peace. Pitt, like Ferdinand, desires conflict: 'Our Minister seems to have

⁷⁷ *PW*, III.1, p. 174.

⁷⁸ *EoT*, I, p. 208.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

been animated with the spirit of an angry woman, who shuts the door with a fling against a rival.⁸⁰ War could be averted if Pitt possessed a superior temperament.

By 1810 Coleridge's conservatism has advanced sufficiently to criticize France with the name 'Misetes' ('hater') and praise Britain as 'Pamphilus' ('Loved by All').⁸¹ However, both in tragic and non-tragic writings Coleridge's exhortations against civil disobedience become consistent. In *The Friend* Coleridge recounts his journey from 'foul bye roads of ordinary fanaticism' as a youth to an appreciation of 'common sense' in maturity.⁸² It is 'common sense' to which Coleridge's tragic writings appeal after *Osorio* and his abandonment of Pantisocracy.

Both Francophobia and the newer, moderate political perspective are evident in Coleridge's fascination with the executed Irish revolutionary Robert Emmet (1778–1803). The same kind of self-identification that Nicholas Roe detects in Coleridge's attitude to Robespierre underlies this interest. Coleridge was a minor political figure; Emmet was a gifted speaker and sometime poet. Coleridge writes that he was once 'like him [...], very young, very enthusiastic, distinguished by talents and acquirements and a sort of turbid eloquence.'⁸³

In 1801 Emmet had travelled to Paris, funded by Napoleon, to discuss the possibility of French assistance in an Irish uprising. However, Napoleon was simultaneously in negotiations with Britain for a peace treaty. Suspicions reached Emmet that Napoleon considered betraying the Irish plans in order to strengthen French relations with Britain. Unimpressed by Napoleon and French foreign policy, Emmet was reticent during his stay in Paris. He avoided the parties to which he was invited, but took the time to study military tactics and to meet Kosciusko. With the treaty of Amiens signed in March 1802, hopes of French intervention in Ireland faded. Rumours of French infidelity divided the United Irishmen, and Emmet imagined that even if a successful rebellion occurred with Napoleon's aid, it would only replace British oppression with French neo-imperialism.⁸⁴ For fear that his plans would be discovered, Emmet hurried the uprising, which failed disastrously as a consequence of poor organization. Emmet was hanged and decapitated, and reports of the display of his head may have reminded Coleridge of John Walford's body. However, Coleridge also had a personal interest in Emmet. When in Dublin, Southey spoke with a close friend of the rebel. Southey declared later that 'God almighty seldom mixes up so much virtue and so much genius in one, or talents as ennobled.'⁸⁵ Hence Coleridge and Southey followed reports of Emmet's trial closely in the *Morning Post*. The newspaper accounts included transcripts of Emmet's famous speech from the dock, censored carefully to omit calls for Irish liberty and to highlight Emmet's contempt for the French.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁸¹ *Friend*, I, p. 304.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁸³ *CL*, II, p. 1002.

⁸⁴ Patrick Geoghegan, *Robert Emmet: A Life*, 2nd edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2004), pp. 101–15.

⁸⁵ Quoted in *Robert Emmet*, p. 91.

Coleridge's admiration is that afforded to a tainted hero, one who, Marianne Elliott explains, appeals to the 'gothic tradition' and engenders his own legacy of 'tragic romance'.⁸⁶ Southey's poem 'Written immediately after reading the speech of Robert Emmet' depicts a Chattertonian 'Youth, Genius, generous Virtue' (l. 41). In a notebook entry, Coleridge writes that 'Emmet=mad Raphael painting Ideals of Beauty on the walls of a cell with human Excrement.'⁸⁷ Timothy Webb notes Coleridge's perception of a tragic flaw in Emmet: 'Madness subverts the very basis of his own artistic genius.'⁸⁸ Coleridge's juxtaposition of ideal beauty and refuse bestows a tragic duality upon the man, a brilliant figure who is also self-destructive.

Yet the lessons Coleridge draws from Emmet's death are typically reliant on misconception and convolution. He is quick to brush aside Emmet's revolutionary ambitions as evidence of 'madness', although nothing of the sort afflicted Emmet in reality. In epistolary reflections Coleridge announces – with some naivety – that Emmet could have grown to love Britain if his desire for reform had been appropriately channelled: 'O if our Ministers had saved him [...] we *might* have had in him a sublimely great man, we assuredly should have had in him a good man, heart & soul an *Englishman*!'⁸⁹ While Coleridge proposes that tragedy would have cured Emmet, that a vision of the catastrophic consequences of uprising would have altered his aspirations and methods, it is Emmet's tale itself that forms a cautionary tragedy to oppose revolutionary politics.⁹⁰ The treatment of Emmet – an Irish rebel distorted into an English patriot – exemplifies again Coleridge's tendency to manipulate his real-life sources to politicize his tragic works. In this Coleridge is true to the tragic, which has been an inherently politicized mode from the anti-Theban plays of ancient Greece to modernity. Coleridge is also an unreliable historian. In his depiction of real events he displays factual looseness that suits the rhetoric of his political journalism. He prioritizes pathos rather than accuracy.

Coleridge's article on Maria Eleonora Schöning of Nuremberg possesses similar overtones concerning the application of reason to avert catastrophe. In contrast with Godwin's radical *Caleb Williams*, which implies that the tragically corrupt legal system should be abolished, in Coleridge's account of Schöning – who has been orphaned, raped and driven to insanity – a merciful magistrate represents the potential for justice to be administered fairly.⁹¹ As the magistrate does not avail himself fully of the opportunity to assist Maria, catastrophe follows, which justifies the educative tragedy of Coleridge's journalism. Opposite to

⁸⁶ Marianne Elliott, 'Robert Emmet: The Making of a Legend', *British Academy Review*, 8 (2005), 24–7 (p. 24).

⁸⁷ *CN*, I, § 1524.

⁸⁸ Timothy Webb, 'Coleridge and Robert Emmet: Reading the Text of Irish Revolution', *Irish Studies Review*, 8:3 (2000), 303–23 (p. 312).

⁸⁹ *CL*, II, p. 522.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1003.

⁹¹ *Friend*, I, p. 348.

Godwin's suggestion in *Caleb Williams* that the judicial system is corrupt, archaic and irreparable, Coleridge wants courts to have greater wisdom and power. Hence Maria's plight is symptomatic of a people under 'the guardianship of a wolfish and merciless oligarchy, proud from ignorance.'⁹²

Frequently Coleridge indicates that ignorance is a chronic social problem: 'The Happiness & Misery of a nation must ultimately be traced to the morals and & understandings of the People.'⁹³ While early works suggest revolution as a means to end ignorance, Coleridge later reverses the model: mankind's improvement, he implies, must occur first on an individual level. Political reform will occur consequentially and peacefully. To find the ideal medium for this visionary, tragic didacticism, Coleridge experiments with various literary forms. While I believe the general critical precept that certain conditions give rise to tragedy, it is also important to note that details of these contexts are very different in each period. Basic similarities are identifiable between the historical circumstances of the ancient Greek tragedians and those of Shakespeare, but their worlds were also greatly dissimilar, and this affects tragedy significantly. Hence I think that Péter Szondi is correct to claim that historical crisis not only occasions tragedy, but causes the mode to be reinvented.⁹⁴ It is in such an atmosphere that Coleridge experiments with tragedy formally.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁹³ *CL*, II, p. 720.

⁹⁴ Péter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*, trans. and ed. by Michael Hays, *Theory and History of Literature*, 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 3–10.

Chapter 4

The Tragic ‘Impulse’: Fragments and Coleridge’s Forms of Incompletion

After *The Fall of Robespierre*, Coleridge did not return to the medium of formal tragedy until the composition of *Osorio* in 1797. Both of these plays must be considered experiments in the mode: Coleridge watched and read tragedy closely but had not studied stagecraft. He did not acquire any close, practical knowledge of how drama should be staged until *Remorse* went into production in December 1812, when he was present at rehearsals. The two early plays display Coleridge’s want of expertise. *The Fall of Robespierre* lacks stage directions entirely other than indications of when characters enter and exit the action. Coleridge does not seem to have imagined how the play would be performed before an audience. The piece was written primarily for publication, but Coleridge does not provide the means even for a reader to visualize the action fully. In the introduction to the published text of *Remorse*, Coleridge, still pained by the failure of the earlier version of the play, reveals that he wrote *Osorio* under a belief that Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), theatre director at Drury Lane, would see the merit of his verse and add the necessary dramatic apparatus:

As an amusing anecdote, and in the wish to prepare future Authors, as young as I then was and as ignorant of the world, for the treatment they may meet with, I will add, that the Person who by a twice conveyed recommendation (in the year 1797) had urged me to write a Tragedy: who on my own objection that I was utterly ignorant of all Stage-tactics had promised that *he* would himself make the necessary alterations, if the Piece should be at all representable.¹

Thus *The Fall of Robespierre* and *Osorio* demonstrate both an inclination towards tragedy and ignorance of how it is produced. *The Fall of Robespierre* can be judged a less serious attempt as Coleridge and Southey’s purpose was to raise funds by sales of the published text, but of *Osorio* Coleridge entertained hopes that he would attain the prestige and financial reward of being a successful playwright for a London theatre.

Sheridan rejected *Osorio* for production at Drury Lane. Coleridge requested that Joseph Cottle publish the play with Wordsworth’s contemporaneous tragedy *The Borderers* and a critical apparatus on principal characters from the plays; Cottle declined. In view of Richard Cronin’s study of Cottle’s ‘grand plan’ for a local literature of south-west England, it seems likely that a printed drama set

¹ Quoted in *PW*, III.2, p. 1063.

in historical Spain was unsuited to Cottle's project to promote provincial epic.² The rejections discouraged Coleridge, but he had already claimed aversion to the composition of stage tragedy. In a letter to William Lisle Bowles following his completion of *Osorio* in 1797, Coleridge expresses his disdain for the work of playwriting:

In truth, I have fagged so long at the work, & see so many imperfections in the original & main plot, that I feel an indescribable disgust, a sickness of the very heart, at the mention of the Tragedy [...]. It is done: and I would rather mend hedges & follow the plough, than write another. I could not avoid attaching a pecuniary importance to the business; and consequently, became anxious: and such anxieties humble & degrade the mind.³

There is further evidence that Coleridge could not adopt the professional mindset necessary to succeed at London's theatres. He lacked persistence and was unable to respond to criticism positively. In a letter to Southey in 1800, Coleridge indicates that *Osorio* was not rejected outright by Sheridan, but that Coleridge's reluctance to revise the play cost him the production: 'Mr Sheridan sent thro' the medium of Stewart [...] a declaration that the failure of my piece was owing to my obstinacy in refusing any alteration.' Coleridge expresses the same sentiment in a letter to Daniel Stuart, but adds that he lacks confidence in his ability as a playwright: 'I am convinced, I have no Talents for so arduous a species of composition as the drama.' To Godwin, Coleridge writes that no legitimate tragedy would succeed in the current intellectual climate. He has credible reasons for this claim and, as I argue in the next chapter, such misgivings shape *Osorio* and the staged version of *Remorse*. But in the letter to Godwin, Coleridge's need to discount contemporary drama to salvage pride as an author is palpable:

The success of a Tragedy in the present size of the Theatres (Pizarro is a Pantomime) the success of a TRAGEDY is in my humble opinion rather improbable than probable —. What *Tragedy* has succeeded for the last 15 years? You will probably answer the Question by another—What Tragedy has *deserved* to succeed? and to that I can give no answer.

Despite the negativity that Coleridge associates with *Osorio*, he decides not to abandon the play entirely. In correspondence with Cottle, Coleridge expresses his desire to include two excerpts from the tragedy in *Lyrical Ballads*: 'I shall print two scenes of my Tragedy, as fragments.'⁴ Hence, Maria's conversation with the Foster-Mother is reproduced in *Lyrical Ballads* as 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' (*Osorio*, IV.ii.3–83). Albert's lamentation on the inhumanity of imprisonment is published as 'The Dungeon' (*Osorio* V.ii.1–30). In further correspondence with Cottle, Coleridge elaborates on his plan:

² Richard Cronin, 'Joseph Cottle and West-Country Romanticism', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 28 (2006), 1–12 (p. 2).

³ *CL*, I, p. 356.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 624, 603, 653, 387.

The extract from my Tragedy will have no sort of reference to my Tragedy, but is a Tale in itself, as the ancient Mariner.—The Tragedy will not be mentioned—/ As to the Tragedy, when I consider it [in] reference to Shakespear's & to *one* other Tragedy, it seems a poor thing; & I care little what becomes of it—when I consider [it] in comparison with modern Dramatists, it *rises*: & I think it too bad to be published, too good to be *squandered*.—I think of breaking it up; the planks are sound, & I will build a new ship of old materials.⁵

The main focus of this chapter is not Coleridge's relationship with theatre, but how the rejection from Drury Lance influences him creatively. With this decision to re-use 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' commences his relationship with the literary fragment. Thus Coleridge's interaction with a form that typifies some of the major works of his canon, including 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan', originates in his failure with *Osorio*. In this chapter I place a special type of literary production within Coleridge's tragic vision; the failed projects that he rehabilitates in a recurrent pattern. I examine also the ways in which Coleridge reverts to a tragic motif of crisis and redemption in diverse literary forms: thematically, as a structural principle, and as a philosophy that he applies to the publication of his own works. I argue that the tragic 'impulse' is common to all of these productions.

Prior to discussion of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', I want to indicate the wider cultural context for Coleridge's construction of a new form using old parts. Consistently, modern scholars define the Romantic period as an age of change, with political, social, scientific and economic development interrelated to literary innovation. For example, Duncan Wu, who condenses the influential argument of M.H. Abrams, unites public and artistic affairs in the Romantic mindset: 'If philosophy could generate revolution, so too could poetry.'⁶ 'Reform', one of the key terms in studies of Romantic liberal politics, bears significant implications for the practices of authorship at the time and specifically of new attitudes to how literary works might be structured. Clifford Siskin observes that writing became identifiable as 'a kind of work' during the eighteenth century, but that the professional boundaries between different modes of authorship were not yet established.⁷ Hence Mervyn and Raymond Williams introduce John Clare as the possessor of a genius whose manifestations were arbitrary; 'a way of seeing and writing [...] which is a state of being, a condition of existence, long before and after it can be formally defined.'⁸ This intermediate position, in which authorship is recognized as a professional occupation, while subdivisions in the practice of writing remain undefined, is crucial to comprehending the variety of Coleridge's literary output.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 412. The 'one other Tragedy' Coleridge alludes to is most likely to be Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.

⁶ *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu, Blackwell Anthologies, 4th edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), p. xxxviii.

⁷ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 5–6.

⁸ *John Clare: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Mervyn and Raymond Williams (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 1.

Within the Romantic atmosphere of change and instability, Coleridge displays a relaxed attitude to literary forms in his critical works. As Coleridge articulates them, the differences between written forms can be minor, and one literary form can metamorphose into another easily. On Shakespeare as author of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, Coleridge comments in 1811 that ‘the impulse to the Drama was secretly working in him.’ This belief in a recurrent ‘impulse’ is important to assess Coleridge’s tendency to manifest his tragic vision in various literary forms. Coleridge invokes a similar principle when he uses catachresis deliberately in his description of *Paradise Lost* in an 1812 lecture. He claims that Milton has ‘acted a real poem.’ Shakespeare ‘proceeded in the same process’ as the Greek tragedians, regardless of Aristotle’s model for tragedy. Novels arise from plays with too many stage directions. In the Bible ‘all persons had been affected with a sense of their high poetic character.’⁹ The forms of artistic production are in flux because of their common ‘impulse’. In a lecture on tragic drama of 1808, Coleridge expands a central constituent of tragedy to claim that opposition is the ‘one great principle’ of all art:

The ever-varying Balance [...] of Images, Notions, or Feelings [...] conceived as in opposition to each other — [...] the infinite gradations between these two from [*sic.*] all the Play & all the Interest of our Intellectual & Moral Being, till it lead us to a Feeling & an Object more awful, than it seems to me compatible with even the present Subject to utter aloud.¹⁰

This anticipates John Payne Collier’s report in 1811 that Coleridge ‘had often thought that Religion [...] is the Poetry of all mankind’, as each aims to broaden people’s perspective beyond their own ‘narrow sphere of action’: ‘By placing them in awful relations [religion or poetry] merges the individual man in the whole & makes it impossible for any one man to think of his future or of his present but in reference to a future without at the same time comprizing all his fellow creatures.’¹¹ With this comment, which equates the purposes of poetry and religion, Coleridge anticipates his definition of the Classical tragedians’ aim in *Biographia Literaria*:

They wished to transport the mind to a sense of its possible greatness during the temporary oblivion of the worthless ‘thing, we are’ and of the peculiar state, in which each man *happens* to be, suspending our individual recollections and lulling them to sleep amid the music of nobler thoughts.¹²

As Coleridge’s articulation of the purpose of religion, and of art in general, resembles the intentions of the Classical dramatists, he implies that a tragic sense informs all art. Nicholas Reid claims that literary form is important to Coleridge

⁹ *LoL*, I, pp. 250, 402, 201, 86, 222.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹² *BL*, II, p. 186.

only as 'the outcome of a transformative process'. Coleridge's real interest, Reid argues, is in a Platonic 'form', an ideal state of art.¹³ This ideal is one of improving literature: Coleridge's dismissal of form as 'superficial' in *Biographia Literaria* arises from his belief that form is subordinate to the poet's chief concern; that he/she 'brings the whole soul of man into activity'.¹⁴ This is the 'impulse' present in many of Coleridge's works in diverse forms.

In this chapter I suggest that Coleridge's poetic practices parallel his critical theories. His works in diverse literary forms are tragic, at times as a set of philosophical ideas, and at others by the formal invocation of Greek tragedy. While I argue that in some poems Coleridge introduces devices of Greek tragedy explicitly to traditionally unassociated forms such as the ballad, all of the poems analysed in this chapter are tragic in the sense that they explore the cycle of catastrophe and redemption fully or partially. Hence the thematic content of a literary work by Coleridge is not necessarily that associated traditionally with the form, but is determined by 'impulse' that occasions it.

I wish also to assess the role of Coleridge's reader, who is intended to undergo an educative process in which tragic literature 'brings the whole soul of man into activity'. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge repeats his hypothesis of Shakespeare's dramatic 'impulse'. He rephrases the idea as 'the great instinct, which impelled the poet to the drama'. The consequence of this 'instinct' is that Shakespeare places unusually philosophical demands on the reader or spectator. The effort necessary to apprehend Shakespeare's meaning produces a beneficial effect in the reader's mind:

You seem to be *told* nothing, but to see and hear every thing. Hence it is, that from the perpetual activity of attention required on the part of the reader [...that] the reader is forced into too much action to sympathize with the merely passive of our nature. As little can a mind thus roused and awakened be brooded on by mean and indistinct emotion, as the low, lazy mist can creep upon the surface of a lake, while a strong gale is driving it onward in waves and billows.¹⁵

Lucy Newlyn is correct to call attention to the manner in which Coleridge uses 'framing devices' to 'foreground the reader's role in constructing meaning'.¹⁶ These devices, such as the Preface to 'Kubla Khan', are but one example of the techniques Coleridge uses to encourage his reader to engage deeply with the text to derive meaning from it. From Wolfgang Iser, I suggest that Coleridge envisions the space between text and reader as an active one in which the reader, although compelled to follow the directions of the text, 'sets the work in motion'.¹⁷

¹³ Nicholas Reid, *Coleridge, Form and Symbol: Or the Ascertaining Vision*, Nineteenth Century Series (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), p. 32.

¹⁴ *BL*, II, pp. 11, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2.

¹⁶ *Paradise Lost*, p. 59.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 275.

That Coleridge does not always expect the reader to enjoy his works as a passive reception of aesthetically pleasant material is communicated, for example, by the title *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), which Coleridge explains in the volume's Preface as an 'allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state in which [the poems] have been suffered to remain.' The title transforms the disorganized state of Coleridge's texts into a sort of success, a challenge to the reader's comprehension. The constructive, interpretative role of Coleridge's ideal reader is implied by the allusion of *Sibylline Leaves* to Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Helenus describes the Cumaean prophetess:

You will see the prophetess in her frenzy,
chanting deep in her rocky cavern, charting the Fates,
committing her vision to words, to signs on leaves.
[...]
But the leaves are light—if the door turns on its hinge,
the slightest breath of air will scatter them all about
and she never cares to retrieve them, flitting through her cave,
or restore them to order, join them as verses with a vision.
So visitors may depart, deprived of her advice,
and hate the Sibyl's haunt.¹⁸

The visitor must retrieve and make sense of the leaves or, as Aeneas does, control the Sibyl's powers of prophecy. Coleridge's allusion to Virgil identifies him with the ancient oracles, an acknowledgment of the diverse and fragmentary nature of his works, and the arduous but beneficial task undertaken by those who read them. The reader too is flattered by the part of the questing Aeneas, and participates in role-play between author and reader that elevates the literary experience to the importance and solemnity of its ancient origins. Yet the reader's role is not entirely free: in *Sibylline Leaves* Coleridge displays his keenness to steer the audience towards particular evaluations of the 'Ancient Mariner'. In this version of the text Coleridge introduces both the Epigraph that invites the reader to consider the supernatural and the marginal gloss that, as Sally West observes, makes 'over-tidy interpretations of the narrative' which are more compatible with Coleridge's Christianity at this time.¹⁹ As the heroic Aeneas is directed by the Sibyl, so too is Coleridge's reader guided by the apparatus of gloss and Epigraph.

The diversity of literary forms used by Coleridge can often be explained by commercial motives. Coleridge and Southey wrote *The Fall of Robespierre*, truly a closet drama as the authors never intended its performance, for publication to fund their proposed settlement in America. Wordsworth and Coleridge's respective tragedies *The Borderers* and *Osorio* were composed to finance their

¹⁸ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 118.

¹⁹ Sally West, *Coleridge and Shelley: Textual Engagement*, The Nineteenth Century Series (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p. 131.

visit to Germany. When neither a theatre nor a publisher was willing to pay for the plays, the authors compiled *Lyrical Ballads* for the same purpose. Of Coleridge's periodicals *The Watchman* (1796) and *The Friend* (1809–10), Lewis Patton opines that 'journalism seemed a natural and inevitable means of expressing one's views, marketing one's verse, and making one's living', which indicates the freedom to adopt various written forms.²⁰ Patton's comment is corroborated by Siskin's observation that 'new periodicals could [...] be launched and sustained with very little capital', and that the author could glean material from other publications without fear of recrimination.²¹ Coleridge's literary lectures, of which he delivered more than 100 from 1808 to 1819, attracted such luminaries as Charles Lamb, Lord Byron and John Keats, but their primary function was to serve the demands of an emergent middle-class that was keen to educate itself. A newspaper prospectus for one of Coleridge's lecture courses in 1818 promises that the auditor will emerge capable of conversation on literature in polite society, whether 'contributing to the entertainment of the social board' or for 'the amusement of the circle at the fire-side'.²² In his letters, Coleridge uses a favourite formulation repeatedly to explain his submission to financial pressure; he declares his deference to the forces of 'Bread and Cheese'.²³ Hence I think that frequently, Coleridge's choices of literary genre are influenced simultaneously by the tragic philosophy and creative opportunism: commercial incentives work with Coleridge's aesthetic preferences to shape his writing.

Synecdoche and Tragic Fragments

Kenneth Burke cites the possibility that any event in a sequence can be used to represent the entire sequence synecdochially: 'if there are, let us say, seven ingredients composing a cluster, any one of them could be treated as representing the rest.' Burke expands upon his point in reference to instances of sacrifice in the 'Ancient Mariner' and *Remorse*. He claims that these allusions to sacrifice signify Coleridge's system of thought, which is heavily reliant on the figure of the scapegoat.²⁴ In adherence with Burke's model of synecdoche and its referent, the larger system of thought, I will analyse 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' as a representative of *Osorio* as a whole and of Coleridge's tragic aesthetic.

In the scene from *Osorio* that forms 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', the eponym recalls a story associated with the nearby prison, of an adopted child who was raised at the expense of Lord Velez. Although he was 'unteachable' and 'never learnt a prayer', the boy became a favourite of Lord Velez ('The Foster-Mother's Tale', ll. 29, 30). However, the narrator explains that reading caused the youth

²⁰ *Watchman*, p. xxvii.

²¹ *The Work of Writing*, p. 4.

²² *LoL*, II, p. 27.

²³ For example *CL*, I, pp. 171, 222, 227, 258; III, p. 97.

²⁴ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 2nd edn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 28–9.

to entertain 'unlawful thoughts' and so to attract suspicion of blasphemy (44). The climax of the Foster-Mother's story is that an earthquake, which caused the nearly fatal collapse of a wall, was attributed to the boy, who was consequently imprisoned, later to escape and flee.

Within 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', all the thematic concerns of the play *Osorio* are represented. The alienated familial love between Velez and the youth represents the feud between Osorio and Albert, and prefigures the gradual estrangement between Maria and her foster-father, Velez, for her inability to love Osorio. The persecution of the youth for his apparent lack of faith re-enacts the subject of religious persecution that permeates the play. The imprisonment of the boy, and his piteous song, exemplifies the mode of lamentation of incarceration adopted by Alhadra and Albert elsewhere in *Osorio*. Finally, the collapse of the wall, like the conjuring scene of *Osorio*, is interpreted by its witnesses as supernatural. These events effect catastrophe and set in motion the process towards purgation in the boy's escape and Osorio's death respectively. I believe that the decision to extract a portion of the play as 'a Tale in itself' illustrates Coleridge's compositions of the period 1797–98. It demonstrates his realization that the tragic can be articulated partially, without portrayal of the entire cycle of catastrophe and catharsis explicitly, and without the need to do so in a theatre. The reasons for such experimentation are both commercial and aesthetic.

In 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' (1798), as in 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', Coleridge uses ancient tragedy as a source for plot devices – pollution, guilt and purgation are prominent themes – but also as a structural principle.²⁵ This corroborates Stephen Maxfield Parrish's claim that 'at a deeper level' than that of 'poetic diction' the *Lyrical Ballads* are 'experiments in dramatic form'.²⁶ Additionally, Greek tragedy extends both temporally and generically our comprehension of Coleridge's claim to imitate 'the elder poets' in the Argument that precedes the poem. When he extracts 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' from its source, Coleridge retains the structure of dramatic dialogue. Similarly, the balladic stanzas of the 'Ancyent Marinere' are presented as a dialogue, a dramatic encounter between the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest. Like the messengers reporting on battle in *Seven Against Thebes* and the self-mutilation in *King Oedipus*, the Mariner fulfils the role of *katoptēs*, 'one who sees [...] to convey [to others] what comes to him through his eyes and ears.' Helen H. Bacon's comment that this literal meaning of the *katoptēs* is of particular interest due to the 'special prominence' of the eyes in the Oedipus myth is applicable to the 'Ancyent Marinere' for the same reason. Both the Mariner's eyes, and those of the undead, 'glitter' ('The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', ll. 3, 13, 475.17).²⁷ Curses originate 'in a dead man's eye',

²⁵ All quotations from 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' in this chapter refer to the 1798 text; see *PW*, I.1, pp. 370–418.

²⁶ Stephen Maxfield Parrish, 'Dramatic Technique in the *Lyrical Ballads*', *PMLA*, 7 (1959), 85–97 (p. 86).

²⁷ Helen H. Bacon, 'The Shield of Eteocles', in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, pp. 24–33 (p. 25).

and the Wedding-Guest admits, 'that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make | My body and soul to be still' (260, 372.1.3–4). Thus Coleridge's repeated allusions to eyes in the poem recall their significance in *King Oedipus*, and also indicate a source for the device of the messenger.

The use of dialogue, in which one character reacts to the other, allows Coleridge to encourage the reader's response with emotional cues. Maria, the internalized audience of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' assists the creation of a tense atmosphere. The Foster-Mother claims that her utterance of the story is 'perilous', and fears that she may be overheard (17). Maria directs the reader to evaluate part of the account as 'a sweet tale', but does not comment on the youth's assumed death abroad, and so leaves the reader to formulate his/her own assessment of the conclusion (68). The extraction of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' from its original context is not flawless – Maria's initial reference to the 'entrance' is unintelligible from the text provided – but Coleridge refines his use of the same tragic devices in the 'Ancient Mariner' (16). The Wedding-Guest, the reader's representative within the poem, acts as tragic chorus; he comments on the Mariner's account to dictate how the reader should respond. Like Maria, the Wedding-Guest provides emotional cues for his audience, and so adheres to the principles of fear and pity, delineated by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as the essential, reactive emotions of the tragic auditor. The Wedding-Guest sympathizes with the Mariner, exclaiming 'God save thee' (79). During the Mariner's account the Wedding-Guest also becomes frightened (224). Finally, the 'sadder and [...] wiser' auditor eschews the merriment he intended to enjoy in the poem's opening sequence, and thus demonstrates the success of a tragic strategy in 'suspending our individual recollections and lulling them to sleep amid the music of nobler thoughts' (624). Simultaneously he presents the reader with the task of interpreting the poem's problematic moral content.

Hermann Fischer claims that the Romantic readership was generally 'looking for literature of a less demanding kind' than traditional forms of tragedy and epic, and preferred the 'naïve tone of folk tradition'.²⁸ Coleridge's decisions to write popular forms of narrative verse and balladry are wise commercial ventures, but his use of Classical sources enables originality within those forms. In the months surrounding the completion of the 'Ancient Mariner' in 1798 Coleridge continues to experiment with the tragic in popular verse-forms, most saliently in a number of poems published later as fragments, including 'Kubla Khan', 'The Three Graves' and 'Christabel'.

It is useful to juxtapose Coleridge's decisions to publish poetic fragments with critical perceptions of his literary philosophy, both contemporary and modern. First, Coleridge's consent to make public inconclusive fragments contradicts John Keats's famous declaration in 1817 that Coleridge lacks '*Negative Capability*':

That is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—Coleridge, for instance,

²⁸ *Romantic Verse Narrative*, p. 35.

would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.²⁹

Keats exaggerates. In some critical writings Coleridge is explicitly in favour of such mystery as constitutes '*Negative Capability*'. In a marginal note of 1828, Coleridge attacks Heinrich Steffens's tendency 'to spoil and excuse to ridicule deep psychological Hints and Possibilities by attempting to ground them in one or two questionable and anomalous facts.'³⁰ In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge states that the reader of a poem 'should be carried forward, not [...] by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself.'³¹ Second, the fragment must be evaluated in relation to Coleridge's theory of organic growth as propounded by M.H. Abrams using an exhaustive selection of passages from Coleridge's critical works. A poem is likened to a plant which germinates in the Imagination and matures successfully as the Imagination digests what it perceives, adapting to – and assimilating materials from – its environment.³² Abrams concludes his analysis by arrival at the plant's 'achieved structure' of 'organic unity', and claims that 'the existence of that whole is a necessary condition to the survival of the parts'.³³ However, Coleridge's decision to break asunder the 'planks' of *Osorio* to publish 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' and 'The Dungeon' separately contradicts Abrams's interpretation. Further study of Coleridge's fragments necessitates an overview of modern scholarship on the Romantic fragment.

In *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (1981), Thomas McFarland posits that British Romanticism falls under the 'diasparactive triad' of 'incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin'. For example, the orphaned and neurotic Wordsworth and Coleridge possess incomplete personalities, which necessitate creative symbiosis. They derive literary impetus from a 'sense that life in the here-and-now is torn and broken.'³⁴ Thus to McFarland the act of authorship is a process in which the writer is consoled or made whole. Wolfgang Iser alludes to the fragmentary nature of the Coleridgean Imagination, which sustains a flawed 'referentiality' to an ideal in its 'unending repetition of nature in the human mind'.³⁵ In adherence to

²⁹ *The Letters of John Keats*, I, p. 193.

³⁰ *CM*, V, p. 252. Coleridge responds to Steffens's claim that spontaneous human combustion is caused by alcoholism: 'The recently accredited Cases of spontaneous Conflagration of Dram Drinkers do not amount to half a dozen.'

³¹ *BL*, II, p. 14.

³² M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 169–74.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³⁴ Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Modalities of Fragmentation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 4–5, 10–11, 65.

³⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 275.

Iser's view of the Imagination, McFarland presents poetry as a type of Platonic form, of which the earthly poem is but a flawed imitation, and he quotes from Shelley's 'Defense of Poetry' (1821): 'The most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the Poet.'³⁶ This Platonic concept, by which all poetic endeavour is doomed to failure, is comparable with the more materialistic view of Kenneth Burke, who finds also that a written work tends to be somehow incomplete due to the nature of authorship. Burke claims that the writing of any poem entails an act of sacrifice: 'Since the symbolic transformation involves a sloughing off, you may expect to find some variant of killing in the work.'³⁷ While he is a pragmatist rather than a Platonic idealist, Burke makes a similar observation to McFarland's, that the effort to convert a thought into a literary work is doomed to partiality. The problem is compounded when the literary production itself has not been finished.

To McFarland, the incomplete poem is a mere part of a flawed artefact; he likens the 'unfinished work' to 'the edifice decayed'.³⁸ This comparison is problematic. Neither McFarland nor Marjorie Levinson – who writes generally of 'The Romantic Fragment Poem' – offers a practical distinction between a poem such as Keats's 'Hyperion: A Fragment', which Keats abandoned but chose to publish in his 1820 volume, and Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', a work interrupted in the manuscript stage by the poet's death in 1822 and published posthumously.³⁹ In the case of Coleridge this difference is important because he chooses to exploit a text's incompleteness to produce a new effect that he did not intend at the time he commenced the work.

To Marjorie Levinson, 'Christabel' is the product of Coleridge's combination of 'the subjectivity, fantasy and sensationalism associated with romance and the impersonal, fatalistic severity of tragedy'.⁴⁰ Like the 'Ancyent Marinere', 'Christabel' is preoccupied with tragic themes such as curse and pollution. Credibly, Levinson cites a series of conventions of Classical tragedy that occur in 'Christabel', and particular resemblances to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. According to Levinson, Sir Leoline, and not Christabel, is the 'tragic hero' of Coleridge's poem. Like the houses of Atreus and Laius, the house of Leoline is under a curse. Christabel must enact the role of Orestes or Electra by expiating this curse, while the bard Bracy fulfils the prophetic role of Cassandra or Tiresias. Levinson notes the tragic love-triangles of Laius–Jocasta–Oedipus and Agamemnon–Clytaemnestra–Aegisthus and speculates upon the existence of a similar dynamic between Leoline, Christabel's mother, and Sir Roland. Hence, she suggests the possibility that Christabel's mother died unnaturally.⁴¹

³⁶ *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 23.

³⁷ *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p. 39.

³⁸ *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 14.

³⁹ Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–9.

Finally, Levinson combines thematic and structural observations to hypothesize that Coleridge, having composed two Parts of the poem, intended to resolve the curse on the household in the course of another three Parts, thus matching the five-act structure of tragedy. While the credibility of her conclusion is impeded by anachronism – the five-act structure is an Elizabethan invention and does not correspond to Classical tragedy – I agree with Levinson's identification of parallels with ancient tragedy as the impetus for the action in 'Christabel'.

Many of the tragic devices identified by Levinson in 'Christabel' are domesticated in the working-class rurality of 'The Three Graves'. As in 'Christabel', the preoccupations of Coleridge's continuation of Wordsworth's poem include the curse, as the jealous mother utters imprecations upon the lovers and their friend, Ellen. Suspiciously, a parent is absent or deceased. The desire of Mary's mother for her daughter's fiancé, Edward, forms a quasi-incestuous love-triangle evocative of that in *King Oedipus*. The character of Ellen, whose relation to the lovers Edward and Mary is unclear, adds further amorous intrigue. Coleridge's contribution to the poem ceases as the mother's curse takes effect:

Then Ellen shriek'd, and forthwith burst
 Into ungentle laughter;
 And Mary shiver'd, where she sat,
 And never she smil'd after.
 ('Continuation of "The Three Graves"', ll. 315–18)

Levinson notes that tragedy introduces a 'reality principle' to counteract the excessive fantasy of romance in 'Christabel'. However, I believe that Coleridge is unable to complete his fusion of tragedy with the popular forms of balladry and verse narrative, and primarily for this reason both 'Christabel' and 'The Three Graves' are unfinished. He introduces themes and plot devices, but fails to impose a tragic structure of resolution on the poems. Coleridge indicates the unlikelihood of completing 'Christabel' in a complaint that it necessitates 'witchery by daylight'. J.C.C. Mays implies that Coleridge's initial purpose was for the poem to act synecdochially, 'simply to present, embody, and suggest' rather than to enact 'the resolution of tensions and oppositions'.⁴² Coleridge articulates a tragic crisis that is irresolvable, but this is incompatible with the romance genre, which requires episodic progress to resolution. Similarly, I suggest that Coleridge gives up 'The Three Graves' because no vision of redemption is viable; as Wordsworth complains, Coleridge 'made it too shocking and painful'. Additionally, however, Coleridge had no obvious financial motivation to complete the poems: John Murray did not publish 'Christabel' until 1816. 'The Three Graves' appears in *The Friend* in 1809, but it is clear that *Lyrical Ballads* failed to popularize new ballads concerned with working-class society. An article in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1812, assessing the *Tales: By the Reverend George Crabbe*, demonstrates the existence of a critical climate that is uninterested in tragedies of the 'lower

⁴² *PW*, I.1, p. 479.

orders', because the circumstances of 'middling life [...] can only be guessed at by those who glitter in the higher walks of existence'. In this atmosphere there is no encouragement for Coleridge to complete such a poem as 'The Three Graves': 'Those who do not belong to that rank of society [...] can neither be half aware of the exquisite fidelity of his delineations, nor feel in their full force the better part of the emotions which he has suggested.'⁴³

The Success of Fragments

Deferring or denying the completion of 'Christabel' and 'The Three Graves', Coleridge is content to have the poems published unfinished. However, the incomplete state of some of Coleridge's poems is transformed to positive effect in their publication. First, a fragment engages readers, as Michael Bradshaw argues: 'it is the combined reward and frustration of a fragment poem both to invite and to thwart analysis, to appeal for interpretation and simultaneously to discredit it.' Further, Bradshaw finds that 'paradoxically, the whole once again becomes the primary form and focus [...] we reinstate an approval of wholeness, and imagine that the text in its whole state is, in an abstract sense, originary.'⁴⁴ When Bradshaw's claim is juxtaposed with Nora Crook's quotation from Shelley to imply that fragments 'sharpen the wits of men' more than other, whole texts, it becomes credible that the attempt to read Coleridge's fragments renders them, ironically, more suited to his project of literature that edifies readers than if the poems had been completed.⁴⁵ 'Indeterminacy', as Iser observes, causes 'mobilization of the reader's imagination.'⁴⁶ Coleridge is explicit that readers should not avoid the challenge of thought that seems fragmentary. From a lecture of 1811 John Payne Collier reports that Coleridge derides readers who ignore certain passages of Shakespeare's works as too difficult:

They were looked upon as hints which Philosophy could not explain: the terra incognita for future discoveries; the great ocean of unknown beings things to be afterward dis explored, or as the sacred fragments of a ruined temple, every part of which in itself was beautiful but the particular relation of which parts was unknown.⁴⁷

The publication of 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' exemplifies other means by which a fragmentary work might generate success in a manner not anticipated

⁴³ *Edinburgh Review*, XVI (1816), p. 279.

⁴⁴ Michael Bradshaw, 'Reading as Flight: Fragment Poems from Shelley's Notebooks', in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. by Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb, The Nineteenth Century Series (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), pp. 21–40 (p. 23).

⁴⁵ Nora Crook, 'Shelley's Late Fragmentary Plays: "Charles the First" and the "Unfinished Drama"', in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, pp. 297–311 (p. 311).

⁴⁶ *Prospecting*, p. 27.

⁴⁷ *LoL*, I, p. 289.

by the author originally. Wordsworth was reluctant to publish 'Christabel' in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* and the poem did not appear in the volume as Coleridge had intended. This ensured that prior to publication in 1816, the poem could only be transmitted orally or by the private circulation of manuscripts. As both of these media reached mostly sympathetic audiences that enhanced the reputation of the poem, an air of mystery was created that 'Christabel' would not have generated had it been published previously, and was responsible for Coleridge's brief friendship with Byron. Thus, the commercial success of the poem is attributable to Coleridge's failure to resolve its tragic crisis, a process repeated closely in the publication of 'Kubla Khan', which likewise remained unpublished for some years due to its fragmentary state, but had acquired a saleable mystique by the time it was made public.

E.S. Shaffer assesses 'Kubla Khan' as 'the translation of the two major classical genres, epic and drama, into their most romantic form', and as evidence of Coleridge's plan to write a longer work on the fall of Jerusalem and 'the recreation of the ancient religious constitution of man in the new Jerusalem.'⁴⁸ The final strophe of the extant poem marks a departure from immediate experience to articulate the poet's sense of loss:

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she play'd,
Singing of Mount Abora.
(*'Kubla Khan or, a Vision in a Dream'*, ll. 37–41)

McFarland assesses this passage as 'banal', 'execrable' and 'appalling'.⁴⁹ While McFarland's criticism of the verse itself is understandable, the prefatory statement, 'Of the Fragment of Kubla Khan', which Coleridge affixes to the 1816 publication, alters the reader's interpretation of the poem by its union of the text with a myth of its aborted creation. The description of the composition that 'passed away' validates the poor poetry of the closing stanza as a manifestation of Coleridge's sense of loss; he becomes identifiable as the speaker-poet. Coleridge employs the preface ingeniously to compound the poem's pathos of an irretrievable paradise. Comparably, Timothy Bahti observes that Coleridge allegorises the poem's incomplete assortment of imagery with the fount of fragments:

A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted Burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail. (19–21)

⁴⁸ E.S. Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 18.

⁴⁹ *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 233.

Noting that the moment of the river forcing up rock fragments is transient, Bahti detects a metaphor for Coleridge's own inability to achieve a 'fluid continuity' in the authorship of 'Kubla Khan'.⁵⁰ Thus the poem is an expression of the author's failure to write it. Yet with the preface Coleridge forms a mythical pattern of a paradisiacal vision granted to him and now departed irretrievably. With the passed empire of Kubla Khan an overall tragic theme emerges; the human condition of loss.

I have argued elsewhere that Coleridge is not the author of a translation of *Faust* that has been published in his name.⁵¹ Yet I think that it is useful to examine some of his responses to Goethe's play, which represent a confluence of two great tragic thinkers of the Romantic period. It is in his reluctance to undertake a project based on *Faust* that Coleridge communicates his sentiments on the tragedy. Coleridge's *Faust*, as much as it exists at all, does so as a number of scattered comments on Goethe's play, characteristic fragments of thought in letters and the *conversazione* of his final years, and perhaps also an annotated copy of the German text that is yet undiscovered. The influence of Coleridge's poetry and criticism is evident in the translation of *Faust* by John Anster, one of his protégés. To introduce the text Anster analyses the supernatural content in Coleridgean, psychological terms:

The mysterious relation between our world and that of spirits has afforded in all ages a foundation for works of the highest poetical interest; no other works of fiction, indeed, have a firmer basis of reality in the depths of the human mind. They bring back to its obscure longings—they give a form to its most inward hopes and apprehensions—to the thoughts, which we scarcely dare to shape into words—and they connect the terrors and eagerness of believing childhood with the wildest and most daring speculations into which we can venture, concerning our nature and our destiny.⁵²

In epistolary advice to Thomas Boosey, who had inquired how a partial translation of *Faust* might be formatted, Coleridge suggested the inclusion of critical matter to explain the reader's intended response to the play. While Boosey did not follow Coleridge's advice, Anster interjects with the type of commentary Coleridge recommended: 'we transfer [Faust's] guilt to the Satanic being by whom he is attended—we pity and forgive him.'⁵³ Anster's vocabulary is more particularly Coleridgean than that of Boosey's translator: 'reverie', 'spectre', 'loftier', 'motion', 'external nature'. Where Anster claims that Goethe's *Faust* possesses a 'charm' found only in Coleridge amongst English poets, I believe he thanks Coleridge

⁵⁰ Timothy Bahti, 'Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the Fragment of Romanticism', *MLN*, 96:5 (1981), 1035–50 (p. 1040).

⁵¹ "'Give it up in despair": Coleridge and Goethe's *Faust*', *Romanticism*, 15:1 (2009), 1–15.

⁵² Quoted in *Faustus: From the German of Goethe, Translated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick and James C. McKusick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 227.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

for advice on his translation, such advice as Coleridge had given previously on Anster's poems in 1819.⁵⁴

Among Coleridge's countless unfulfilled projects is a plan to write a version of *Faust*, but a 'better' one. Coleridge offers blunt and compelling reasons for his reluctance to translate Goethe's play: 'Faust himself is dull and meaningless [...]. A large part of the work to me is very flat.' Coleridge perceives an opportunity to write a superior play, and describes a detailed synopsis of the plot in conversation:

My Faust was old Michael Scott; a much better and more likely original than Faust. He appeared in the midst of his college of devoted disciples, enthusiastic, ebullient, shedding around him bright surmises of discoveries fully perfected in after-times, and inculcating the study of nature and its secrets as the pathway to the acquisition of power. He did not love knowledge for itself—for its own exceeding great reward—but in order to be powerful. This poison-speck infected his mind from the beginning.⁵⁵

What is remarkable about Coleridge's plan for *Michael Scott* is the number of borrowings from his own drama. Under suspicion of blasphemy from priests, Scott is incarcerated, and escapes; as 'to witchcraft Michael turns with all his soul', the exploitation of magic is revealed to be folly and propels the character toward crisis; the incorruptible female character is used as an exemplary figure of virtue as the plot moves towards resolution, and by indicating the possibility of goodness she is an agent of catharsis.⁵⁶ Each of these devices has an antecedent in Coleridge's manuscript play *Osorio* and the revised version, the successful *Remorse*. To amend the defects he perceived in Goethe, Coleridge resorted to his own previous work. Coleridge was a notorious recycler of material, and the practice is acutely noticeable in his dramas. Asked to write a tragedy to open at Drury Lane, he did no more than revise the 15-year-old *Osorio* manuscript. This staged play, *Remorse*, incorporates no fewer than 10 lines from Coleridge's translation of *The Death of Wallenstein*. In turn he considered revising his *Wallenstein* translations of 1800 'as an original work, & in one Play' for the stage in 1817.⁵⁷

Whatever his reasons for not fulfilling the *Michael Scott* project, I think from the similarities the plan bears to *Remorse* that it was not necessary for Coleridge to write this new version of *Faust*, which would inevitably have covered familiar ground. Furthermore, where Coleridge finds the philosophy of Goethe's play unpalatable, as Paul Hamilton argues, I also find evidence of a broader struggle with the tragic in Coleridge's later years; in my final chapter I argue that this eventually leads him to abandon the mode.⁵⁸ Thus his extant responses to *Faust*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁵⁵ *TT*, I, p. 197.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 197–9.

⁵⁷ *CL*, IV, p. 733.

⁵⁸ Paul Hamilton, Review of *Faustus: From the German of Goethe, Angermion: A Yearbook of Anglo-German Cultural Relations*, 1 (2008), 175–9.

are not synecdoches of Coleridge's unwritten version of the play, but evidence of a greater problem he develops with tragedy itself.

Novalis (1772–1801) observes that the fragment is symptomatic of the literary innovations of his time, and represents the false starts of formal experimentation. He writes in *Pollen* (1798), 'The art of writing books has not yet been invented. But it is on the point of being invented. Fragments of this sort are literary seeds. There may indeed be barren grain among them: yet if only some sprout!' ⁵⁹ Some of Coleridge's unfinished works display such experimentation. At other times Coleridge raises philosophical issues in his poems which he cannot resolve, and this causes them to remain unfinished. Ironically, in the provocative nature of its irresolution, the fragment achieves one of Coleridge's chief aims as an author; it 'brings the whole soul of man into activity'. The partial representation of the tragic cycle in Coleridge's fragments functions identically to the 'Foster-Mother's Tale' and the 'Ancient Mariner', which I presented as synecdoche. While I argue broadly that Coleridge possesses a tragic philosophy, by which all catastrophe yields eventually to redemption, it is evident at a less grand level in the process of salvaging doomed literary projects: partiality assumes an air of deliberation and completeness, failures become successes. As I suggest the merit of Coleridge's protean ability to assume various literary forms while he employs the devices of tragedy, I wish also to demonstrate the importance of contemporary theatre to him. The rejection of *Osorio* leads Coleridge to a crucial innovation within his body of works, yet he has not parted from the stage finally. While a rehabilitation of the modern, critical view of Coleridge's relationship with the theatre seems to be underway, there is yet insufficient recognition that he produced some of the most successful drama of the Romantic period.

⁵⁹ Novalis, 'Aphorisms and Fragments', trans. by Alexander Gelley, in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. by A. Leslie Wilson, The German Library, 21 (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 62–83 (p. 67).

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Chapter 5

The Lear Vocation: Coleridge and Romantic Theatre

Coleridge wrote two plays intended for the stage, *Remorse* and *Zapolya: A Christmas Tale*. Both were produced during his lifetime. While the manager of Drury Lane, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, rejected the manuscript of *Osorio* in 1797, it was revised as *Remorse*, which opened at Samuel Whitbread's renovated Drury Lane on Saturday, 23 January 1813. It became the most successful new play of the 1812–13 season. To put Coleridge's achievement in perspective, Richard Holmes notes that 'no new verse tragedy had run for more than ten nights since 1777.'¹ After a run of 23 performances at Drury Lane, *Remorse* was staged in more than 20 locations from 1813–15. Venues included theatres royal, provincial stages and barns, in places such as Edinburgh, Bath, Bristol, New York, Boston and Philadelphia. In a production of *Remorse* in Exeter, the part of Alvar was played by Edmund Kean (1787–1833), the foremost tragic actor of his generation. Also to become prominent, Alexander Rae (1782–1820) established his acting reputation by his depiction of Ordonio. Rae chose *Remorse* for his benefit night at Drury Lane in 1817, and the play was revived for this purpose several times. Under the patronage of Sir Richard Bickerton, a commander-in-chief of the navy, *Remorse* was staged in Portsmouth in March 1813 for the benefit of a Mr Kelly. An advertisement in a local newspaper explains that Coleridge's play was selected due to its 'unequivocal success' in London.²

Encouraged by the success of *Remorse*, Coleridge assumed that *Zapolya* would be staged at Drury Lane with the assistance of Byron, who served as a member of the theatre's board. This did not occur, and Coleridge concluded erroneously that the staging of Charles Maturin's tragedy *Bertram, or the Castle of St. Aldobrand* (1816) violated an agreement to stage *Zapolya*. Thus aggrieved, Coleridge composed a series of letters to *The Courier* in which he attacked Maturin's play and the board at Drury Lane. This material was substantially reprinted to form Chapter 23 of *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge complains that Whitbread did not fulfil his promise to save British theatre from 'pernicious barbarisms and Kotzebuisms in morals and taste'. He embarks on an ill-spirited, rambling and unnecessary attack on Maturin's rather inconsequential play, the primary error of which is presumably that it succeeded where *Zapolya* failed.³ It is remarkable that the experience with *Osorio* had not taught Coleridge to beware the whim

¹ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 321.

² *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 8 March 1813, p. 4.

³ *BL*, II, p. 208.

of theatre managers. The pride brought by success with *Remorse* seems to have caused a much more dramatic response to the situation with *Zapolya* than the earlier disappointment with Sheridan.

In a letter of 1821, Coleridge informs Robert William Elliston (1774–1831), the current manager at Drury Lane, that he has not forgotten the perceived slight over *Zapolya*: ‘As a representative of the Drury Lane Theatre, though in no respect your own person and character, you owe me a little set off for the indignity, caprice and neglect shown by your predecessor to me with regard to *Zapolya*.’⁴ However, there is no evidence that the board at Drury Lane was aware of any arrangement to stage Coleridge’s play. Byron recalls an impression that Coleridge had ‘nothing feasible in hand’ when he asked for a new play, and the committee turned to Maturin and *Bertram* instead.⁵ But despite the disappointment of rejection by London’s patent theatres, a version of *Zapolya* was produced for 10 performances at the Surrey Theatre in London in 1818. Coleridge had no direct involvement with this production and made no comment on it that survives, but under Elliston’s management from 1809–19 the Surrey Theatre had, Jane Moody observes, ‘acquired a reputation as the most respectable of London’s minor theatres.’⁶

Although the financial successes of *Remorse* and *Zapolya* exceed the theatrical achievements of any of Coleridge’s contemporary Romantic poets, Coleridge’s staged plays have received relatively little critical attention. Even among professed Coleridge specialists his plays have commonly been ignored or dismissed. In *Coleridge the Poet* (1966), a title that declares a complete and authoritative evaluation of Coleridge’s poetical works, George Watson declares that ‘the oddity that [Coleridge] alone among the English romantic poets achieved a successful run on the London stage ought not to disguise the fact of total failure.’ From this convoluted utterance Watson proceeds to surmise of *Remorse* that ‘no one could wish to see it revived’.⁷ *Zapolya* is dismissed by Watson as a ‘feeble imitation’ of Shakespeare; an evaluation at odds with the *Theatrical Inquisitor*’s anonymous reviewer, who found that the play was ‘too good’ for the Surrey Theatre.⁸ Katharine Cooke offers a perceptive assessment of Coleridge as dramatist in *Coleridge* (1979), but this has not attracted significant attention to the plays.⁹ In the *Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (2002), introduced by Lucy Newlyn as a volume that ‘does full justice to the many facets of Coleridge’s life’, only one reference is made to *Remorse*.¹⁰ In the volume’s biographical essay, Kelvin Everest acknowledges that the ‘the success of *Remorse* [...] kept

⁴ CL, V, p. 161.

⁵ Byron’s *Letters and Journals*, IX (1979), p. 35.

⁶ Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 35.

⁷ George Watson, *Coleridge the Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53; quoted in *PW*, III.2, p. 1331.

⁹ Katharine Cooke, *Coleridge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 37–57.

¹⁰ Lucy Newlyn, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, pp. 1–14 (p. 5).

[Coleridge's] reputation alive'.¹¹ Yet neither Everest nor any of the volume's other contributors expands on the claim, nor explains why a play of sufficient quality to sustain Coleridge's literary 'reputation' during his lifetime is unworthy of analysis in a collaborative book by 16 experts. Ostensibly the more recent *Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (2009) addresses this deficit with a dedicated chapter on Coleridge as playwright, but disappointingly George S. Irving merely revives Carl Woodring's political interpretation of the plays and discusses them in reference to the Gothic tradition. Erving's argument has nothing to do with such matters as theatres, stages, actors, plots, audiences, dramatic structure and scenery.¹² In a more positive contribution, Reeve Parker makes a credible, biographical analysis of Coleridge's revisions to *Remorse* in production. Parker reads the new lines in relation to Coleridge's anguish over his relations with Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson. This is one of very few studies to join the poet and man to the theatre.¹³

Assisted by the availability of authoritative editions even of incomplete works, scholars of Coleridge tend now to adopt a comprehensive approach to his creative output rather than sole focus upon critical and poetical works deemed canonical. Slowly the plays are receiving recognition within Coleridge's body of works, based primarily upon their relevance to his writings in other forms. For example, in observation of the evolution of Coleridge's dramatic style, J.C.C. Mays indicates that Coleridge's dramas 'cry out to be incorporated within an understanding of his writing as a whole—which becomes more explicable, richer and more interesting as a result.'¹⁴ Similarly, Julie A. Carlson advises that 'scholars of Coleridge and romanticism should take a cue from the fate of Ordonio and his creator: inevitably we must face up to *Remorse*.'¹⁵ Mays's interest is stylistic, Carlson's thematic, but both identify the plays as necessary for a broader interpretation of Coleridge's creative mind. In this chapter I examine *Remorse* and *Zapolya* in relation to Coleridge's tragic vision, but in doing so, I wish also to emphasize the quality of the plays in their own right. *Remorse* and *Zapolya* were popular entertainments in their time and are worthy of notice that is not only tangential to analyses of Coleridge's major poems. Initially, a study of the plays necessitates a re-evaluation of Coleridge's opinions on contemporary theatre, his goals as a playwright and his relation to critical concepts that are salient in the study of Romantic drama.

To introduce *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (2003), Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer create a vignette of a visit to see *Remorse* in its original production:

¹¹ Kelvin Everest, 'Coleridge's Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, pp. 17–31 (p. 27).

¹² George S. Irving, 'Coleridge as Playwright', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, pp. 392–411.

¹³ *Romantic Tragedies*, pp. 159–75.

¹⁴ J.C.C. Mays, 'Are Coleridge's Plays Worth the Candle?', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 29 (2007), 1–16 (p. 15).

¹⁵ *In the Theatre of Romanticism*, p. 98.

Imagine yourself heading on foot through the largely dark streets of London on January 25th, 1813. Turning a corner, you see one of the few brightly lit buildings in the metropolis: the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane, where you hope to see the second night of a new tragedy, *Remorse* [...]. The space [...] is dazzling. Its gold, green and crimson interior illuminated by what seems a thousand candles set in burners and chandeliers throughout the theater, Drury Lane seats over 3,100 people. Tonight it is quite full, both with those interested in Coleridge's play and those there to see the pantomime that will follow [...], *Harlequin and Humpo*.¹⁶

The authors depict Regency theatre as a vibrant world. Yet Cox and Gamer's essay also corroborates J.C.C. Mays's argument that Coleridge's plays pose an 'embarrassment to admirers of his poems, and the few themes that are shared are small comfort to annotators. How could such a high Romantic poet be a crowd-puller in a Regency popular form?'¹⁷ Mays's implication is that Humpo, Dumpo and the other evil dwarves of Dibdin's pantomime provide unsuitable company for the visionary author of 'Kubla Khan'. The populous theatre, frequented notoriously by prostitutes amongst other undesirables, is an unlikely location for the solitary metaphysician of the 'Dejection' ode. It is indicative of the modern, scholarly 'embarrassment' that Coleridge's early and unstaged manuscript of *Osorio* has, ironically, received more critical attention than the widely staged *Remorse*. However, *Osorio* also fits comfortably the critical model of the radical closet-drama, a concept that is inconvenienced by *Remorse* and *Zapolya*; consequently, the staged plays have been overlooked.

Frederick Burwick refers to a 'lack of significant drama' produced during the Romantic period.¹⁸ Timothy Webb surveys the genre under the self-explanatory title, 'The Romantic Poet and the Stage: A Short, Sad History'.¹⁹ Daniel P. Watkins goes so far as to claim that an utter 'collapse' of drama occurred.²⁰ These are typical surveys of Romantic theatre that posit that public taste and the creative practices of the major poets developed incompatibly during the Romantic period. While melodrama and spectacle rose to dominate London's theatres, such arguments run, the Romantic poets adopted psychological foci that were difficult to represent onstage. Broadly these claims are correct, but some modern scholars have used

¹⁶ *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*, ed. by Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer, Broadview Anthologies of English Literature (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), pp. vii–viii.

¹⁷ 'Are Coleridge's Plays Worth the Candle?', p. 2.

¹⁸ Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 267.

¹⁹ Timothy Webb, 'The Romantic Poet and the Stage: A Short, Sad History', in *The Romantic Theatre: An International Symposium*, ed. by Richard Allen Cave (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1986), pp. 9–46.

²⁰ Daniel P. Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 4.

such beliefs to originate arguments about Romantic authors that generalize and are wildly inaccurate, and reinforce their claims with selective quotations that can be misrepresentative. For example, Aileen Forbes is one of the more recent commentators to reiterate a common critical summation, one that presents the dramatic works of Romantic poets as adverse reactions to trends in contemporary theatre:

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron, for instance, begin to publish largely unactable plays that thereby give rise to the peculiar genre of ‘closet drama’—drama that asserts its status as literature, as drama to be read in the privacy of one’s ‘closet’ rather than seen and heard performed on a public stage.²¹

In fact, the closet drama is not an innovation of the Romantic period and has existed arguably since Seneca’s time. The definitive characteristic of the closet drama is that the author intends for it to be experienced in the privacy or ‘closet’ of reading rather than in the public context of staged performance. However, dramatic intention and results vary greatly between Coleridge and his contemporaries: not all Romantic plays were written for the closet, nor did all end up in it.

While mistaken entirely about the historic origins of the closet drama, Forbes demonstrates the persistence in scholarship of the conceptual Romantic closet-drama; allegedly a deliberate mode that stands alongside the greater Romantic lyric and the ‘conversation’ poem. I argue that the concept of the Romantic closet-drama is an inadequate critical tool primarily because it requires a definition of Romanticism that is now obsolete, that of the ‘Romantic Movement’. Just as the Romantic Movement of the ‘Big Six’ authors forced together writers with divergent beliefs, some of whom were even enemies, the idea of the Romantic closet-drama misleads by its collation of authors who write for different purposes. The hypothesis of Romantic closet-drama requires a crude reduction of different writers’ philosophies and practices to a simplistic notion of anti-theatrical prejudice. By examining the dramatic aspirations of some Romantic authors, I wish to discourage the application to Coleridge of the label ‘closet dramatist’ and to recommend its more cautious usage in Romantic studies.

While Wordsworth indicates a lofty disdain for theatre – for example, where he lambasts the drama based on the Buttermere scandal, as discussed in a previous chapter – it is possible that he does so to conceal an old disappointment. Despite claiming in 1842 that *The Borderers* was written ‘without any view to its exhibition on the stage’, Wordsworth felt sufficient desire for theatrical success in 1798 to travel to London. Dorothy Wordsworth reports that ‘William has been induced to come up to alter his play for the stage at the suggestion of one of the principal Actors of Covent Garden to whom he transmitted it.’²²

²¹ Aileen Forbes, “‘Sympathetic Curiosity’ in Joanna Baillie’s Theater of the Passions”, *The European Romantic Review*, 14:1 (2003), 31–48 (p. 32).

²² Quoted in *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn, The Cornell Wordsworth (London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 4; *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Chester L. Shaver, Ernest de Selincourt and others, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967–93) I, p. 195.

Likewise, Coleridge hoped for success with *Osorio* when he received Sheridan's invitation to submit a tragedy to Drury Lane. That both plays were rejected in identical terms indicates the inability, rather than necessarily the disinclination, of Wordsworth and Coleridge to write for the stage in their early careers. Their preoccupation with inner life makes poor theatre. In a letter of 1798 Elizabeth Threkeld informs Samuel Ferguson that Thomas Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, has rejected *The Borderers* due to 'the metaphysical obscurity' of the protagonist, Rivers.²³ Coleridge attributes his negative response from Sheridan to the 'the obscurity of the three last acts' of *Osorio*.²⁴

Byron, a sometime ally whom Coleridge believed would ensure that *Zapolya* was staged, has a more complex attitude to the theatre than Wordsworth or Coleridge. While Byron informs John Murray in 1821 that *Marino Faliero* is 'for the Closet', his comment is an irate reaction to Robert William Elliston's criticisms of the play's long speeches prior to its production at Drury Lane, not a dismissal of staged drama as a medium.²⁵ David V. Erdman reasons that Byron 'protests too much' against the stage and argues that a lack of confidence in his stagecraft characterizes Byron's attitudes to the theatre.²⁶ In addition to Erdman's argument I speculate that Byron might have felt an unwelcome contributor to the English stage after his ejection from the board at Drury Lane and his scandalized departure from the country in 1816.

In the introductory matter to *Prometheus Unbound* (1819), Percy Bysshe Shelley claims that he has not written the play with any intention of its performance. In his preface, Shelley indicates that *Prometheus Unbound* is directed at a more exclusive audience than the theatre-going crowd, and that he has made no attempt to write an entertainment, but aims to 'to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical reader with the beautiful idealisms of moral excellence.' However, Shelley's sentiments do not necessarily imply that he maintained a consistent disregard for stagecraft, as the same year he hoped *The Cenci* might be performed at Covent Garden, with Edmund Kean in the lead role.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge Joanna Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' to her *Series of Plays* (1798), quotation from which is a commonplace of modern criticism of Romantic closet-drama. Baillie claims that the printed drama, free from the embellishment of London's directors, possesses 'an advantage which, perhaps, does more than over-balance the splendour and effect of theatrical representation.' However, Baillie also explains that she has made no effort to have her plays staged at the time of publication only because she lacks the necessary

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁴ *CL*, I, p. 358.

²⁵ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, V (1976), p. 90.

²⁶ David V. Erdman, 'Byron's Stage Fright: The History of his Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage', in *The Plays of Lord Byron*, ed. by Robert F. Gleckner and Bernard Beatty, Liverpool English Texts and Studies (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), pp. 5–31 (p. 6).

contacts with London's theatres: 'I possess [...] no likely channel to the [...] mode of public introduction.'²⁷ Subsequently Baillie made sufficient connections for two of her plays to be staged during her lifetime, *De Montfort* in 1800 and *The Family Legend* in 1810.

The prior examples merely acknowledge the diverse attitudes of Romantic authors to the theatre. They demonstrate that the attempt to term a body of plays 'closet-dramas' is complicated by the range of circumstances that cause plays to remain unstaged. This is true even within Coleridge's own corpus of dramatic works. *The Fall of Robespierre* was written for publication, and was not submitted to any theatre, but this might be attributed to the authors' knowledge that plays with Jacobin sympathies were unlikely to be accepted by theatres, and that the work was of low quality. Coleridge's *The Piccolomini* and *The Death of Wallenstein* were intended for a readership, but were designed as such because they were contractual translations conducted at the request of the publisher, Thomas Norton Longman. However, their status was not fixed: in a letter of 1817 Coleridge indicates an intention to rewrite the plays for the stage, 'as an original work, & in one Play'. Thus a work produced for a select readership interested in German tragedy could be reinvented as popular entertainment. This process might be reversed too, as in 1817 when Coleridge allowed the publication of *Zapolya*, which had so far been declined by London's theatres.

The mode of the Romantic closet-drama that is posited frequently in modern criticism is the product, according to some scholars, of a prejudice against the theatre common to many Romantic authors. Again, I present Aileen Forbes's essay as a relatively recent example of a familiar type of argument. Forbes finds that an anti-theatrical prejudice amongst Romantic authors is epitomized by Charles Lamb's essay 'On Garrick, and Acting; and the Plays of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for Stage Representation' (1812):

Foremost among these Romantic anti-theatrical voices is Charles Lamb's [...]. To Lamb's chagrin, theater during the Romantic period is overwhelmed by sensory experience; it constitutes a sensational theater in which the organs of sense are excited at the expense of the mind [...]. Shakespeare should not be performed but read.²⁸

Lamb's opinion of contemporary theatre is antagonized by the cult of celebrity evident in the star system, in which famous actors eclipse a play's other components. He claims to feel 'scandalised' by the erection of Garrick's statue next to Shakespeare's in Westminster Abbey, which equates the actor with the great author. Lamb derides the belief that an actor/actress might possess 'a *mind congenial with the poet's*'; any person who thinks this 'confound[s] the power of originating poetical images and conceptions with the faculty of being able to

²⁷ Joanna Baillie, *Plays on the Passions*, ed. by Peter Duthie, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 109.

²⁸ "'Sympathetic Curiosity" in Joanna Baillie's Theater of the Passions', pp. 31–2.

read or recite the same when put into words.²⁹ This repeats a point that Coleridge makes in a lecture of 1811, in which he despairs 'to hear speeches usurped by fellows who owed their very elevation to dexterity in sniffing candles since all the inferior characters, thro' wh. our poet shone no less conspicuously and brightly, were given them to deliver.'³⁰ Coleridge does not assume so extreme a position as Lamb, who claims that to see Shakespeare's plays staged destroys an ideal: 'we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood.' Lamb claims that 'the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted [...]. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual [...]. It is his mind which is laid bare.'³¹

While aspects of Lamb's criticism of the stage are negative, his essay is not exclusively so. Discussing *Hamlet*, Lamb explains that 'I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted.'³² The complaint that earthly manifestation departs from ideal is applicable to any artistic representation and not theatre alone. This does not discourage artistic practice; Lamb himself 'made another thing' of *Hamlet* when he and Mary Lamb wrote their *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). His observation that actors transform a play does not forbid nor even discourage their efforts. Roy Park emphasizes that Lamb 'does not recommend closet drama, nor anywhere imply a preference for it.'³³ Jonathan Bate also observes that Lamb's essay 'is not the unequivocal attack on the stage it is often taken to be' despite being 'nearly always the first cited text in support of a view that Romanticism was antipathetic to the stage.' Bate proceeds to observe that Lamb 'remained a keen theatre-goer throughout his life'.³⁴ Furthermore, Lamb's own drama *Mr H* was staged at Drury Lane in 1807. In this chapter I argue that a similar ambivalence characterizes Coleridge's attitudes to and writing for the stage.

In notes for a lecture on *King Lear* of 1812, Coleridge responds to Lamb's essay with a richly philosophical passage that is alive to the potential of theatre. Coleridge meditates on the symbolic power of language and its evocation of the sublime:

Men are now so seldom thrown into wild circumstances, & violences of excitement, that the language of such states, the laws of association of Feeling with Thought, the starts and strange far-flights of the assimilative power on the slightest & least obvious likenesses presented by Thoughts, Words, & Objects, & even by this their very power [thereafter] as strange but always certain return to

²⁹ *Lamb as Critic*, ed. by Roy Park (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 85–6.

³⁰ *LoL*, I, p. 254.

³¹ *Lamb as Critic*, pp. 87, 96.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁴ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 129–30 and n.

the dominant Idea—these are judged of by *authority*, not by actual experience—What they have been accustomed to regard as symbols of this state, not the natural symbols—i.e. the self-manifestations of it—(Even so in the Language of man & that of nature) [...]. The sound, Sun, or the figures, S U N, are pure arbitrary [modes of] recalling the Object, & for visual mere objects not [only sufficien]t, but have infinite advantages from their [very nothing]ness *per se*; but the language of Nature is a subordinate Logos, that was in the beginning, and was with the Thing, <it> represented, & it was the Thing represented.³⁵

Here Coleridge recalls a well-known notebook entry of 1805, which expresses his continuous effort to find an external representative of man's divinity: 'In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new.'³⁶

Coleridge continues his 1812 lecture notes with an implication that language transcends its constituent words and letters best on the stage; the 'Thing represented' is not lost to Coleridge as it is to Lamb when an author's play is 'made another thing' in production. To Coleridge, authorial intention and artistic representation can exist simultaneously onstage, and he is explicit that to watch a play is superior to reading it:

Now the language of Shakespear (in his *Lear*, for instance) is a something intermediate, or rather it is the former blended with the latter, the arbitrary not merely recalling the cold notion of the Thing but experiencing the reality of it, & as arbitrary Language is an Heir-loom of <the> Human Race, being itself a part of that which it manifests [...and so!] What would appear mad or ludicrous in a book, presented to the senses under the form of reality & with the truth of Nature, supplies a species of actual Experience.³⁷

Coleridge exalts the power of drama, but the realization of this power is compromised by the circumstance of its production. The stage Coleridge alludes to is logocentric, but the spectacular stage during his lifetime was not: his lecture implies a need for reform in theatres to fulfil the potential of the stage.

Like Lamb's, Coleridge's attitude to the stage is ambivalent; occasionally he praises contemporary theatre, and sometimes he is derogatory about it. Coleridge derides the hugely popular adaptations of Kotzebue on London's stages as 'pantomime'.³⁸ In 1824 Coleridge complains that 'our theatres [...] are fit for nothing; they are too large for acting, and too small for a bull-fight.'³⁹ Yet Coleridge,

³⁵ *LoL*, I, pp. 428–9.

³⁶ *CN*, II, § 2546.

³⁷ *LoL*, I, pp. 428–9.

³⁸ *CL*, I, p. 653.

³⁹ In contrast with the ancients, who used 'pipes' to 'convey the voice distinctly in their huge theatres.' *TT*, II, p. 53.

like Lamb, was a diligent attendant of the theatre at times. E.K. Chambers reports a claim that Coleridge attended Drury Lane as frequently as ‘four times a week’ in 1800.⁴⁰

A number of Coleridge’s comments on contemporary theatre are double-edged, seeming laudatory and mocking simultaneously. The poem ‘To Eliza Brunton, on Behalf of Francis Wrangham’ (1794) mocks Wrangham’s conventional adulation of the addressee’s elder sister, the actress Ann Brunton (1769–1808):

That Darling of the Tragic Muse—
 When Wrangham sung her praise,
 Thalia lost her rosy hues
 And sicken’d at his Lays.
 (‘To Eliza Brunton’, ll. 1–4)

The remark of the comic muse Thalia, which ends the poem, acknowledges Eliza Brunton’s own acting talent, but also derides the lionization of actresses, who are implied to be commonplace and indistinct; there is a tragic Brunton and likewise a comic one:

‘Meek Pity’s sweetest Child, proud Dame!
 The fates have giv’n to you!
 Still bid your poet boast her *Name*—
 I have my Brunton too.’ (9–12)

The 1795 sonnet on Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), which Coleridge wrote in collaboration with Lamb, concludes with an exclamation of the actress’s powers to elicit sympathy: ‘Thou, SIDDONS! meltest my sad heart’ (‘To Mrs Siddons’, l. 14). The comparison of the auditor to ‘a child [...] clinging to its Grandam’s knees’ evokes the power of Siddons’s performance, but might also be interpreted as a slight on an actress who continued to play Shakespeare’s Juliet into her late thirties (1–2). Siddons is described as a ‘Beldame’, suggestive of the French ‘belle dame’, but with English referents that vary from a grandmother to a hag (10). Similarly, Coleridge’s appraisal of Edmund Kean in 1827 is an allegory that both flatters and rebukes with its implication of excitement mixed with impracticality: ‘His rapid descents from the hyper-tragic to the infra-colloquial, though sometimes productive of great effect, are often unreasonable. To see him act, is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.’⁴¹ Jonathan Bate infers that, to Coleridge, Kean’s method of delivering melodramatic “‘hits” [...] emphasized out of all proportion’ is detrimental to ‘the continuity of the play’.⁴²

The Prologue to *Remorse*, written by Charles Lamb, and delivered at Drury Lane in 1813 by an unknown actor named Mr Carr, expresses much of the same

⁴⁰ E.K. Chambers, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 122.

⁴¹ *TT*, I, p. 41.

⁴² *Shakespearean Constitutions*, p. 141.

ambivalence towards theatre. While Coleridge complains in a letter that ‘It is hard to say which was worse, Prologue or Epilogue’, Lamb’s Prologue was included in the texts of *Remorse* printed in 1813, from which Coleridge’s own Epilogue was omitted.⁴³ In his Prologue Lamb criticizes the stage, but parodically uses staged performance as the medium for his attack. The Prologue is delivered in the person of an actor, and opens with a defence of England’s large theatres, but one that is reliant on the egocentricity of play-producers mindful only of door receipts. The irony of these lines was accentuated by the circumstance of its delivery, as the sole actor strained his voice to be heard by Drury Lane’s audience of more than 3,000 people:

There are, I am told, who sharply criticise
Our modern theatres unwieldy size.
We players shall scarce plead guilty to that charge,
Who think a house can never be too large.
(Prologue, ll. 1–4)⁴⁴

Lamb sustains his irony with the speculation that Shakespeare, constrained by the size and facilities of the Globe Theatre, would share the mentality of nineteenth-century players, and would envy the commercial benefits of production for the Regency stage. This mock-Shakespeare gratifies himself by abstracting applause from the audience that gives it, and is thus equated with the avaricious producers of Regency theatre. The often rowdy crowds at Drury Lane are flattered as attentive:

Shakespeare, who wish’d a kingdom for a stage,
Like giant pent in disproportion’d cage,
Mourn’d his contracted strengths and crippled rage.
[...]
How he had felt, when that dread curse of Lear’s
Had burst tremendous on a thousand ears,
While deep-struck wonder from applauding bands
Return’d the tribute of as many hands! (21–31)

Lamb suggests an ironic juxtaposition of Shakespeare’s ‘rude’ audience and the superior crowd at Drury Lane, but attacks the latter with an implication that Shakespeare’s original auditors suspended disbelief with an ‘intellectual eye’ unknown to Lamb’s contemporaries, who are drawn to costumes and gimmickry (32, 45).

Lamb’s allusion to *King Lear* of the plays in Shakespeare’s canon not only confronts contemporary practices in stagecraft, but calls attention to the political contexts of drama in theatres. It was not possible to see the *King Lear* that Shakespeare wrote staged during Coleridge and Lamb’s lives because, from 1681

⁴³ *CL*, III, p. 428.

⁴⁴ Quotations from *Remorse* in this chapter are from the staged version; *PW*, III.2, pp. 1063–134.

until 1838, Nahum Tate's mangled version of the play was preferred by theatres. Tate omits the character of the Fool, provides a superfluous love story between Cordelia and Edgar and gives the play a happy ending. Additionally, from 1811–20 a tacit agreement existed between the London theatres not to stage *King Lear* at all due to the monarch's insanity and 'in order', as Jane Moody surmises, 'to avoid spectators drawing parallels between the tormented, irrational behaviour of Lear, and the illness of George III.'⁴⁵ Hence a demand for *King Lear* on the stage is a confrontation of timid and compliant theatre managers. To resurrect Shakespeare and stage the proper *King Lear* would reinstate catharsis through suffering onstage, and readmit tragedy that provokes political discussion rather than censoring it. Such reforms, to Lamb, are as unlikely to occur as the necromancy necessary to summon Shakespeare in person at Drury Lane.

The Prologue ends with a proleptic defence against negative criticism of *Remorse*, a claim that Coleridge follows the tradition of 'Severer muses and a tragic strain' (52). While Lamb attacks the contemporary stage, he desires the play to be successful, and challenges the audience to respond favourably by demonstrating an appreciation of the tragic tradition. The literary subtexts of Lamb's Prologue and Coleridge's 'tragic strain' appeal to the tastes of learned auditors in addition to the masses drawn by the play's use of spectacle. Coleridge's desire to win over both these types of audience shapes his drama. The reviewer in *The Sun* who complains that Lamb's Prologue 'related more to the theatre than the play' misses the point: Lamb makes explicit the existence of conflicting opinions on the contemporary stage, common to himself and Coleridge, that are evident within *Remorse* and *Zapolya*.⁴⁶

George S. Erving wonders how a formerly rejected play went into production at all, and poses provocative questions on the staging of *Remorse*:

How is it that a play rejected by Sheridan for its obscurity should later become one of Drury Lane's more successful productions? Was Sheridan merely mistaken, or did its positive reception reflect changes in the political environment, or changes in theatrical taste, or changes in the manuscript, or some combination of these?⁴⁷

The play *Remorse* is not hugely different from *Osorio*, although Erving is correct to note that Coleridge tones down the character of Alhadra to quell some of the earlier draft's radicalism. Sheridan was 'mistaken'. This is clear from the commercial success of *Remorse*. As to the content of *Remorse*, a central argument of this chapter is that the audience simply enjoys the display in happy ignorance of the play's philosophical 'obscurity', and that Coleridge knows they will. Furthermore, while the preoccupations of Erving's essay are political readings and the Gothic tradition, I think that the reasons that *Remorse* was produced are more greatly attributable to realities of stage production than thematic matters. It was

⁴⁵ *Illegitimate Theatre*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ Quoted in *PW*, III.2, p. 1052.

⁴⁷ 'Coleridge as Playwright', p. 403.

probably quite convenient, and relatively economical, for Samuel Whitbread to stage *Remorse*. Of his time on Drury Lane's sub-committee, Byron complains of the scarcity of good plays:

The number of *plays* upon the shelves were about *five* hundred;—conceiving that amongst these there must be *some* of merit—in person & by proxy I caused an investigation.—I do not think that of those which I saw—there was one which could be conscientiously tolerated.—There never were such things as most of them.⁴⁸

It seems likely that in such a scenario, as he planned the first season of the new Drury Lane, Whitbread recalled an acceptable tragedy by Coleridge and spared himself the task of looking through submitted manuscripts. Whitbread must have realized also that *Remorse* could be produced quite cheaply by using materials that already belonged to the theatre. Only one piece of new scenery was created for the play, aside from which stock scenery, costumes and props were used. Finally, Coleridge had acquired a good reputation as a lecturer when *Remorse* was accepted in 1812. His recognition as an authority on tragedy was an asset that he did not possess as a younger man who, within a year of writing *Osorio*, worried that the odium attached to his name might damage the reception of *Lyrical Ballads*.⁴⁹

Hamlet Vocations

In *The Hamlet Vocation of Wordsworth and Coleridge* (1986), Martin Greenberg investigates the implications of one of Coleridge's most famous self-referential remarks. As he evaluates Hamlet's character in table talk of 1827, Coleridge indicates 'the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical' in Hamlet, and concludes with a dry suggestion: 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself.'⁵⁰ To Greenberg, the 'Hamlet vocation' implies 'being "called" [...] to a life of inwardness, introspection, mind [...] with [...] the dangers of the reflective mind split apart from the effective will', and thus being parted 'from human life and action.'⁵¹ Greenberg argues that Hamlet and Coleridge's atrophy of the body leads to 'a desert of inanition, paralysis, a falling below the level of nature, out of human life, into impotent intellection.'⁵² In Coleridge's case, Greenberg argues, this neglect of the external world leads ultimately to death as a poet.

In a review of Greenberg's study, Lucy Newlyn expresses scepticism that the 'Hamlet vocation' concept possesses 'a meaning in the role-playing beyond the simple contrast that it sophisticates' between the relatively unfulfilled Coleridge and

⁴⁸ Byron's *Letters and Journals*, IX, p. 35.

⁴⁹ *CL*, I, p. 412.

⁵⁰ *TT*, I, p. 61.

⁵¹ Martin Greenberg, *The Hamlet Vocation of Wordsworth and Coleridge* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1986), p. xi.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

the apparently more prolific and successful poet Wordsworth.⁵³ Newlyn believes that 'Greenberg distorts Coleridge' to his end; that he simplifies Coleridge's psychology to accord with the model provided by Hamlet at the expense of, for example, the possibility of joy imparted in the 'Dejection' ode.⁵⁴

I wish to draw out both Greenberg and Newlyn's arguments. Among the omissions of Greenberg's reductive concept is a similarity between Coleridge and Hamlet that alters, and strengthens the credibility of, the idea of the 'Hamlet vocation': both men stage plays. Hamlet writes and directs a conscience-catching drama to test the villainous King, 'The Murder of Gonzago'. Coleridge is not only the author of *Remorse* and *Zapolya*, but is present to advise actors at Drury Lane from 1812–13 and Calne in 1815, and coaches a Mr Bengough in the role of Ordonio at Bristol in 1814. Coleridge tailors *Remorse* to the abilities of the cast, and consequently he writes of the climactic scene that, 'Spite of wretched Acting the Passage told wonderfully'.⁵⁵ Joanna Baillie concurs in a letter to Sir Walter Scott: 'we have a new Tragedy here by Colridge [*sic.*] called remorse which is going on prosperously under the disadvantage (I am told) of very bad acting'.⁵⁶ Despite his doubts concerning the quality of actors available to perform *Remorse* in Edinburgh, Scott concludes in turn that 'Coleridge has succeeded so well that I trust he will write again'.⁵⁷ However, the major significance of the commonality of stage direction between Hamlet and Coleridge is that metadrama provides the impetus for *Remorse* and *Zapolya*. By this method Coleridge exploits and criticizes the practices of the Regency stage simultaneously. In doing so, if not to expose the usurpation of a monarch, Coleridge provokes his spectators to consider the nature of contemporary stagecraft.

The conjuring scene of *Remorse* III.ii was the main attraction to its original audience at Drury Lane. Ordonio has ordered the disguised Alvar, who purports to be a sorcerer, to produce a display that will convince Teresa of Alvar's death. Ordonio hopes that Teresa will marry him, accepting the loss of Alvar. Instead Alvar reveals an image of his own intended assassination by Ordonio's men, as though the attempt had succeeded. Coleridge's conjuring scene shares several details with Schiller's novel, *The Ghost-seer* (1789):

An altar, draped with a black cloth, had been set up in the middle of the circle, and under it was a stretched red satin carpet [...]. A dense smoke of frankincense

⁵³ Lucy Newlyn, 'Reviewed Work(s): *The Hamlet Vocation of Coleridge and Wordsworth* by Martin Greenberg and *The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats* by Charles J. Rzepka', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 39:155 (1988), 450–52 (p. 451).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁵⁵ *CL*, III, p. 434.

⁵⁶ *Collected Letters of Joanna Baillie*, ed. by Judith Bailey Slagle, 2 vols (London: Associated University Press, 1999), I, p. 321.

⁵⁷ *Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson, 12 vols (London: Constable, 1932–37), III, pp. 399–400.

spread its dark vapours through the room and almost choked the flames [...]. Suddenly we felt a blow like a thunderbolt, so violent that our hands fell apart; an abrupt clap of thunder shook the house, all the locks clattered, all the doors slammed to, the lid of the vessel fell shut, the light was extinguished, and on the opposite wall above the fireplace a human shape became visible, in a bloody shirt, pale, and with the face of a dying man.⁵⁸

Coleridge's incantation scene is set in the hall of armoury in the castle of Lord Valdez, a set designed by William Capon. This was the only new piece of scenery in the play for which Samuel Whitbread was willing to pay. In Schiller's novel, the Sicilian achieves his flash of light using phosphorus, and Coleridge's Alvar does likewise, introducing a new visual trick to the English stage, as Frederick Burwick notes.⁵⁹ However, the grandeur of the conjuring scene was not only visual, but included an extravagant musical element. The singing of Maria Theresa Bland (1769–1838) was a particular attraction to the audience, as George Raymond attests: 'Mrs. Bland was deservedly a permanent favourite with the public—the best English ballad-singer on the stage. Her popularity rested solely on her professional merits.'⁶⁰ In his *Reminiscences*, composer Michael Kelly (1762–1826) describes his musical arrangement, which accompanies the scene, and its effect:

The chorus of boatmen chaunting on the water under the convent walls, and the distant peal of the organ, accompanying the monks while singing within the convent chapel, seemed to overcome and soothe the audience; a thrilling sensation appeared to pervade the great mass of congregated humanity, and, during its performance, it was listened to with undivided attention, as if the minds and hearts of all were rivetted and enthralled by the combination presented to their notice; and at the conclusion the applause was loud and protracted.⁶¹

Typically for the period, advertisements for both of Coleridge's plays attracted audiences by reference to aspects of the production that made the strongest sensory impact, either in scenery or in instrumental score. In the playbill for the opening night of *Remorse* at Drury Lane, a specific reference is made to the play's highlight: 'In Act III, an INVOCATION by Mrs. Bland. The MUSICK, composed by Mr. Kelly.' Similarly, the Surrey Theatre's playbill for *Zapolya* alludes to the 'Grand Entrance to the Castle & Palace of the King of Illyria' and entices with the possibility that werewolves lurk in the 'WAR WOLF'S CAVE'. Critics too emphasized novelties of production rather than the script. In a review of *Remorse* for the *Morning Chronicle* of 25 January 1813, an article commonly (but wrongly) attributed to Hazlitt until recently, the critic describes the incantation scene in

⁵⁸ Friedrich von Schiller, *The Ghost-seer: An Interesting Tale from the Memoirs of Count von O***, trans. by Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), p. 19.

⁵⁹ *Illusion and the Drama*, p. 268.

⁶⁰ George Raymond, *The life and enterprises of Robert William Elliston, comedian* (London: Routledge, 1857), p. 206.

⁶¹ Quoted in *PW*, III.2, pp. 1104–5n.

Remorse as ‘one of the most novel and picturesque we have ever witnessed’. The reviewer for *The Examiner* of 31 January, who seems to ascribe the suspension of disbelief to sensory overload, reports that ‘We never saw more interest excited in a theatre than was expressed at the sorcery-scene in the third act’: ‘The altar flaming in the distance, the solemn invocation, the pealing music of the mystic song, altogether produced a combination so awful, as to nearly overpower reality, and make one half believe the enchantment which delighted our senses.’⁶²

From the warm response to the conjuring scene in *Remorse*, Frederick Burwick infers that Coleridge’s audience ‘probably enjoyed [*Remorse*] for all the wrong reasons’. Burwick implies that the emphasis on the spectacular risks the play’s claim to participate in the tragic tradition.⁶³ While I agree with Burwick’s speculation, I believe that Coleridge anticipates his audience’s focus on sensory grandeur in *Remorse*, and that this is evident in the play’s use of parabasis. While Burwick finds that self-referentiality may destroy dramatic illusion, I find that Coleridge addresses conventions of contemporary theatre and the expectations of its audience in a manner that is sufficiently subtle for the fictionality of the play to remain uncompromised.⁶⁴

The invocation scene in *Remorse* III.ii is a theatrical power-struggle by which Coleridge criticizes the use of spectacle to ensure commercial success on the Regency stage, yet nonetheless uses it himself. The purpose that John S. Mebane detects in *The Tempest* and Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* is also present in *Remorse*: metadrama is employed ‘in order to lead us to reflect upon the work of the theatrical artist as a specific instance of the attempt to control the world by influencing the human mind and imagination’.⁶⁵ The attention paid to the medium of spectacle in *Remorse* indicates Coleridge’s concern with appropriate and inappropriate means of exerting influence on the mind in theatre, and the limitations of visual stimulation. Unlike the spells of Prospero and Faustus, the magic in *Remorse* is false; the audience knows it is mere show. Ordonio and Alvar each believes himself to be the director of the imminent action, the supposed invocation of Alvar’s ghost. To Ordonio, the intended audience of the display is Teresa, whom he wishes to persuade, by the sorcerer’s magic, that Alvar is dead. However, Alvar plans a different show from that Ordonio has requested. Alvar’s primary auditor is Ordonio himself, whose conscience Alvar wishes to stimulate. While Alvar believes that he directs the action, and not Ordonio, his theatrics are threatened. He is distracted repeatedly from playing his role as sorcerer by his wish to embrace his father – ‘I must not clasp his knees’ – and his love for Teresa, ‘full of faith | And guileless love’ (III.ii.5, 26–7). Teresa, whom Coleridge presents as an exemplary character in the Epilogue, eschews spectacle by leaving the scene of the invocation

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1101.

⁶³ *Illusion and the Drama*, p. 267.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁵ John S. Mebane, ‘Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination in *Dr. Faustus* and the *Tempest*’, *South Atlantic Review*, 53:2 (1988), 25–45 (p. 26).

in favour of prayer: 'At a holier altar I will bow down | And seek a surer light' (III.ii.25–6). Teresa refuses to enter the contract of dramatic illusion; she will not suspend disbelief for the show before her. With implicit didacticism, her rejection of tawdry demonstration is a matter of morality as well as taste: prayer's 'surer' light is of the 'intellectual eye' rather than the bodily eye that observes the display. Thus the watcher is implied to be blasphemous for his delight at mere spectacle.

After the departure of Teresa, Lord Valdez and Ordonio are the auditors of Alvar's invocation. Ironically, spoken language produces Alvar's desired effect, while his grand visual-stimuli fail. Alvar discomforts Ordonio with questions:

What if thou heardest him now? What if his spirit
Re-enter'd it's cold corse, and came upon thee
With many a stab from many a murderer's poniard?
What if (his steadfast Eye still beaming Pity
And Brother's love) he turn'd his head aside,
Lest he should look at thee, and with one look
Hurl thee beyond all powers of Penitence? (III.ii.70–76)

The act of observation is perilous; by looking at Ordonio or averting his gaze, Alvar can condemn his brother to damnation 'beyond all powers of Penitence'. The gaze empowers evil, but to turn the eyes away defeats it. By contrast, words alone have beneficial power, in prayer and conversation. Alvar's speech causes Ordonio to '*struggl[e] with his feelings*' (III.ii.77+SD.). Thus Alvar realizes his goal, to 'rouse a fiery whirlwind in [Ordonio's] conscience' (II.ii.153). The visual aspects of the invocation represent, as Frederick Burwick observes, a 'metadramatic exploitation and repudiation of stage trickery.'⁶⁶ Alvar believes that he will stimulate Ordonio's conscience with histrionics, and commands the music to rise. The chant of monks sounds offstage, and the magic show begins: '*Gong sounds & the incense on the altar takes fire suddenly, and an illuminated picture of ALVAR's assassination is discovered, and having remained a few seconds is then hidden by ascending flames*' (III.ii.100+SD.). However, Ordonio does not respond with remorse, but with anger against the failed assassin who has deceived him, 'the villain Isidore' (III.ii.101). The audience understands that the tragedy of *Remorse* is consequential to the failure of the spectacle: Ordonio, enraged rather than repentant following Alvar's invocation, murders Isidore. This crime leads to Ordonio's death by Alhadra's sword. In addition to its condemnation of theatrical spectacle, the unexpected failure of Alvar's incantation provides a plot twist that lessens the final scene's focus on the conventional moment of recognition. There is relatively little notice to the revelation that Alvar is Ordonio's long-lost brother, apparently back from the dead. Instead concentration centres instead on the pathos created by Ordonio, as Coleridge explains in a letter, punning on the name of the actor, Alexander Rae: 'As from a circumference to a centre, every Ray in the Tragedy converges to Ordonio.'⁶⁷ Joseph W. Donohue observes that with

⁶⁶ *Illusion and the Drama*, p. 268.

⁶⁷ *CL*, III, p. 434.

this climactic confluence of the play's themes and plots, Coleridge emphasizes a commonality between villain and theatrical audience, as each instigates the play's action in a sense:

We ourselves justify the danger of presenting gross immorality in the character of Ordonio by the interest we take in his mental problems. His imbalance produces the tragic action of the play, while his very imperfection leads us to see his thoughts and acts as analogous to our own. Because the illusion, to which we voluntarily submit, has been effected through the exercise of the 'irremissive' will of the artist, a mutual sympathy is produced, a kind of circularity which proceeds from the poet through the dramatic character to the audience and then back to the poet.⁶⁸

Characters, auditors and the author are united in a process by which events onstage not only instruct, but also purge all who are within this connection. The *Morning Chronicle* critic demonstrates his sensitivity to Coleridge's moral purpose, to present 'a succession of situations and events that call forth the finest sensibilities of the human breast.'⁶⁹

The positive reviews of *Remorse* at Drury Lane validate Coleridge's opinion that it succeeded despite 'wretched Acting'. In particular, Coleridge faults the over-acting of 'the blundering Coxcomb, Elliston' as Alvar, who marginalizes Rae. In turn, Rae lacks the required 'volume & depth of Voice' of a strong actor.⁷⁰ These are typical assessments of the two actors' abilities. Elliston became better known as a comic actor, and one obituary is frank about his tragic delivery:

In tragedy, for want of a strong sympathy for the serious, he sometimes got into a commonplace turbulence, and at others, put on an affected solemnity; and he was in the habit of *hawing* between his words [...]. Unfortunately, he fancied that he was never more natural than on these occasions. He said once, at the table of a friend of ours, clapping himself on the knee, and breathing with his usual fervour, 'Nature-*aw*, Sir, is every thing-*aw*: I-*aw* am always-*aw* natural-*aw*.'⁷¹

Lamb depicts an occasion in which Elliston complains that he has been forced out of tragic roles:

'Have you heard,' said he, 'how they treat me? they put me in *comedy*.' Thought I—but his finger on his lips forbade interruption—'where could they have put you better?' Then, after a pause—'Where I formerly played Romeo, I now play Mercutio,'—and so again he stalked away, neither staying, nor caring for, responses.⁷²

⁶⁸ Joseph W. Donohue Jr., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 302.

⁶⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, XVIII (1813), p. 463.

⁷⁰ *CL*, III, p. 436.

⁷¹ *The Annual Biography and Obituary: 1832* (London: Longman, 1832), p. 55.

⁷² Charles Lamb, *The Last Essays of Elia: Being a Sequel to Essays Published Under that Name* (London: Moxon, 1833), p. 40.

By contrast, Alexander Rae became a prominent tragic-actor, who according to the *European Magazine* ‘displays a classic intimacy with his author, and ornaments the character he represents by a good person, appropriate action, and polished deportment.’⁷³ However, Rae was not universally respected. In disbelief Barry Cornwall lists plays in which a waning Kean starred alongside Rae, but in which the more prominent role was given to ‘the mouthing, ranting, inefficient Rae’. Cornwall surmises that Rae’s ‘head was intended for other purposes than for the comprehension of character’. He depicts a quiet and ponderous man who would quite easily have been made to exert a negligible presence by Elliston.⁷⁴ It is tangible that their collaboration could threaten Coleridge’s purpose that all attention should ‘converge to Ordonio’. Thus the circumstances in which *Remorse* was produced seem to have justified and illustrated Coleridge’s misgivings about contemporary theatre, and with metadrama the work comments on its own production.

In *Zapolya*, as in *Remorse*, Coleridge alludes repeatedly to the play’s fictionality. In the play’s Advertisement, Coleridge introduces *Zapolya* as derivative, claiming that it has been written ‘in humble imitation of the Winter’s Tale of Shakespear’. As Adelaide represents Coleridge in *The Fall of Robespierre*, and Alhadra does in *Remorse*, Sarolta fulfils the same function in *Zapolya*. In a draft for a projected scene to link the Prelude to the main body of the play, Coleridge hints at Sarolta’s preternatural sensitivity to the plight of those around her, and terms her the ‘guardian angel’ of Illyria.⁷⁵ To be cast as a presiding figure detaches Sarolta from the other characters of the play, of whom she demonstrates near-omniscience comparable to an author’s. In a soliloquy, Sarolta signals that the plot of the play will adhere to the conventions of the genre now termed ‘romance’. She predicts the recognition of Glycine’s noble parentage in a scene that bears the influence of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*:

Something above thy rank there hangs about thee,
And in thy countenance, thy voice, and motion,
Yea, e’en in thy simplicity, Glycine,
A fine and feminine grace, that makes me feel
More as a mother than a mistress to thee!
[...]
Thou art sprung too of no ignoble blood.
(*Zapolya*, I.i.65–73)

After this prophetic speech, Sarolta initiates the sequence of events that leads to the revelation that the adopted Bethlen is actually Andreas, displaced heir to the throne of Illyria. Bethlen’s experience is a literary rite of accession, a process that commences with Sarolta’s words:

⁷³ *The European Magazine, and London Review*, 68 (1815), p. 292.

⁷⁴ Barry Cornwall, *The Life of Edmund Kean*, 2 vols (London: Moxon, 1835), I, pp. 65, 56.

⁷⁵ *PW*, III.2, p. 1426.

Be thou henceforth *my* soldier!
 And whatsoe'er betide thee, still believe
 That in each noble deed, achieved or suffered,
 Thou solvest best the riddle of thy birth! (I.i.412–15)

Ultimately, Sarolta provides the opportunity for heroism that confirms the legitimacy of Bethlen's claim to the throne, as Bethlen rescues her from Emerick's intended rape. Consistent with the pantomime tradition, Sarolta's calmness reassures the audience that she is not in great danger. Hence the main action of the play is to an extent orchestrated or 'staged' by Sarolta, who can predict that Andreas's valour will protect her from Emerick's villainy.

Coleridge uses metadramatic technique again to direct the plot of an incomplete drama set in Arabia, *Diadestè; or, The Bait without the Hook: A musical Entertainment in one Act* (composed 1811–15). The title alludes to a game between the married couple of Zelica and Kheder, in which one person's omission of the word 'Diadesti' from the appropriate point in conversation results in deference to the other, who becomes 'Sovereign of the Tent' for one month (*Diadestè*, l. 21). This game is crucial to the resolution of the play's action, as Zelica wishes to free Kheder's English slave, Elizabeth. To accomplish this Zelica must subjugate her husband, which is only possible by the 'Diadesti'. Although described by Coleridge as mere 'musical Entertainment', *Diadestè* examines the constraints of social decorum and gender politics. To manipulate Kheder into the submissive role Zelica must trick him into neglecting to say 'Diadesti'. The word 'Diadesti' is crucial to the action of the play, but Zelica 'scarcely know[s] what it means' (10). Thus, Coleridge investigates the extent to which social interaction is scripted, and implies that truthful expression is restricted by the cant of polite behaviour and its conventional speech-patterns. The innovation in Coleridge's plan for this work reflects his preoccupation with the power of language. The characters of *Diadestè* are compelled to employ a certain phrase in conversation, but Coleridge loads the expression with significance, as it enables the characters to attain social status. In empowering the meaningless word 'Diadesti' Coleridge provokes reflection on the nature of conversation and specifically the tendency to utter commonplace phrases without reflection on their implications. The force of language transcends the awareness of its users. Overall the project of such incisive commentary within a 'musical Entertainment' fails, as *Diadestè* is incomplete, but Coleridge's fragment anticipates his successful synthesis of music and comedy with the tragic tradition in *Zapolya*.

Romance Form and the Tragic Vision

The metadramatic criticisms of the Regency stage evident in *Remorse* and *Zapolya* complicate examination of their tragic vision, as the extent of the author's sincerity is uncertain. In *Remorse*, the interpretative attempt is complicated by Coleridge's concessions to amend the script at the request of actors and managers.

In 1813 Coleridge confesses this occurrence to Southey: '[I] am nicknamed in the Green Room the anomalous Author, from my utter indifference or prompt facility in sanctioning every omission that was suggested.'⁷⁶ Although Coleridge derides the flaws of popular theatre, the artistic vision of his staged plays is subject to a desire to succeed commercially, to provide 'Bread and Cheese'. However, while *Remorse*'s relation to the tragic mode is obscured by the various influences on its production – artistry and commerce – Coleridge signals explicitly that *Zapolya* is in dialogue with tragic tradition.

William Hazlitt's dismissal of *Zapolya* indicates reasons for the subsequent neglect of the play among Coleridge's works. To attack Coleridge in the *Yellow Dwarf* in 1818, Hazlitt quotes Raab Kiuprili's defiant speech on Emerick's usurpation (Prelude 355–72). Kiuprili dismisses the democratic concepts of 'popular choice' as 'shallow sophisms' (Prelude, 354). To Hazlitt the passage, an 'exquisite morceau of political logic', is a 'dramatic recantation of the author's popular harangues'.⁷⁷ Influenced by this criticism, Carlson claims simply that Coleridge's 'composition of *Zapolya* celebrates the restoration of French monarchy'.⁷⁸ The apparent simplicity of the play as political allegory allows for limited analysis in recent decades in which New Historicism has been prevalent. In this context *Zapolya* seems only the work of an elder Romantic poet, the product of a transparent conservatism that is unattractive to the later critic. Yet Kiernan Ryan argues that 'genetic' or historical analysis cannot provide profitable insights into romance plays: 'The error to which genetic criticism is prone is that of dissolving the text into its contexts: looking for the significance of the text anywhere but where it is most likely to be found, which is in the language and the structure of the work itself.'⁷⁹ Ryan's argument corroborates Coleridge's own comments on *Zapolya*, in which he prioritizes aesthetic principles and indicates no wish to create political allegory.

Of the play's quality, Coleridge's acknowledgement that *Zapolya* has been written 'in humble imitation of the Winter's Tale' is not itself evidence that the work is unworthy of critical attention. Famously, Coleridge dismisses 'Kubla Khan' as a 'psychological curiosity', and 'Christabel' as primarily a 'metrical experiment'. His comment has two effects on our interpretation of *Zapolya*. First, rather than confirming that the work is merely imitative, it demonstrates further Coleridge's self-identification with Shakespeare, which poses a more complex question of influence and its anxieties rather than a case of simple duplication. Writing *Zapolya* is an exercise by which Coleridge assesses his own abilities as a dramatist, which, he concludes, are 'humble' next to Shakespeare's. Secondly, Coleridge's introduction to *Zapolya* places the play in the ill-defined genre of

⁷⁶ *CL*, III, p. 432.

⁷⁷ *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: Dent and Sons, 1930), XIX, p. 203.

⁷⁸ *In the Theatre of Romanticism*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Kiernan Ryan, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare: The Last Plays* (New York: Longman Limited, 1999), pp. 1–21 (p. 10).

dramatic romance. Of Shakespeare's romances, for example, *Cymbeline* was categorized as a tragedy in the First Folio, but *The Winter's Tale* as a comedy. However, in the Advertisement for *Zapolya*, Coleridge cites Aeschylus as an influence on the play, and thus clarifies the place of romance in his tragic vision: 'I have called the first part a Prelude instead of a first Act, as somewhat nearer resemblance to the plan of the ancients, of which one specimen is left us in the Aeschylean Trilogy of the Agamemnon, the Orestes, and the Eumenides.'

Coleridge conjectures that all Greek tragedies were written in trilogies that, although the majority of the plays is lost, he believes were ultimately redemptive. Each tragedy of the trilogy, Coleridge explains in a lecture, corresponds to the individual act of a modern play. For Coleridge, to adopt the model of the ancient trilogy differs from conventional, modern tragedy because it dispenses with 'Unity of Time', an Aristotelian principle that Coleridge cites frequently in lectures as an essential characteristic of tragedy.⁸⁰ 'Unity of Time' dictates that the events of a tragedy must take place within a given time-scale: in Classical tragedy this is 24 hours. The trilogy as a whole extends this period: while the events of each tragic play are limited to a single day, an interval can exist between the individual plays of the trilogy. Hence Orestes, an infant in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, takes revenge as an adult in *The Libation Bearers*.

Coleridge uses the interval in plot to demonstrate – rather than intimate – that redemption follows tragic occurrences. By collapsing the duration between catastrophe and redemption, a comprehensive depiction of both is possible. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Agamemnon's death is depicted, but the establishment of law is evident only at the trilogy's conclusion. In *Zapolya*, the use of the 20-year interval enables Coleridge to present Emerick's usurpation and the suffering of Zapolya, but also the restoration of legitimate rule at the play's end. In works such as *The Fall of Robespierre*, 'The Ancient Mariner' and *Remorse* only hints of an eventually positive outcome are possible. The benefits of Robespierre's execution are difficult to detect, the enlightened Wedding-Guest is made melancholy by the Mariner's instruction, and Alhadra's claim that sacrifice will lead to liberation is overshadowed by the historic fact of Phillip II's persecution of Muslims. By contrast, the model Coleridge derives from Aeschylus allows redemption to become tangible. It is an achievement noted by G. Wilson Knight, who observes of *Zapolya* that 'the terrible is definitely incorporated into the immortal hope [...] so good and evil interfuse'. While Wilson Knight hints at the conservatism of the work as it relates to Romantic politics, he also indicates its debt to tragic tradition. Wilson Knight argues that *Zapolya* is a process of reconciliation between 'dark and Dionysian' forces and Apollonian restoration of order. He indicates Coleridge's continuous effort to make tragic art, and claims that the 'possibilities of good-through-evil [are] glimpsed' in 'Fears in Solitude', the 'Ode on the Departing Year', and 'The Destiny of Nations', in which St Joan is 'able to bear and transmute the burden of world-evil.' To Wilson Knight, this is 'a synthesis most

⁸⁰ *LoL*, I, p. 83.

perfectly accomplished in *Zapolya*: hence the high place to be accorded dramatic literature and the supreme importance of dramatic action in the New Testament.⁸¹ E.D. Forgues writes for the *Revue de Paris* in 1837 that Coleridge succeeded aesthetically with the publication of *Zapolya*, although he is unaware that a version of the play was staged. Hence Forgues reinforces the idea that Romantic authors wish to maintain a haughty distance from the popular entertainment of theatre. Thus while he praises it as the best drama for 20 years – and deems Byron's plays inferior – Forgues effectively puts *Zapolya* in the closet.⁸²

Wilson Knight shares Coleridge's opinion that theatre, like religion, is a serious and instructive medium. In *Zapolya*, Sarolta, Bethlen, Zapolya and Raab Kiuprili provide examples of how to 'transmute evil'. A similar pattern is detectable in the unfinished play *The Triumph of Loyalty* (1800–1801), based on Lessing's synopsis of Antonio Coello's *El conde de Sex, o Dar la vida por su dama* (1638). Coleridge's title demonstrates that he wishes to revise Coello's tale as 'a sort of dramatic Romance'.⁸³ All of Coleridge's works for the stage retain the tragic principle of moral or spiritual education, and Coleridge's dramatic compositions are littered with aphoristic didacticism. In *The Triumph of Loyalty*, Earl Henry criticizes the irate reaction of his brother, Don Curio, to the Queen's muted reception of the returning army:

We are sunk low indeed, if wrongs like our's
Must seek redress in impotent Freaks of Anger. (I.ii.68–9)

In *Diadestè*, Zelica warns Elizabeth that 'merry trifles end in mournful earnest' (3–4). Elizabeth advises that 'Despondency is no Sharpener of the Wit', and Zelica warns that flattery is 'a rank, tho' gaudy, Weed, which Friendship treads under foot, and Love himself will seldom stoop to pluck' (MS2 ll. 40, 50–51). *Remorse*, critical of tawdry histrionics, strikes a key note that Coleridge repeats as the epigraph in published texts of the play:

REMORSE is as the heart, in which it grows:
If that be gentle it drops balmy dews
Of true repentance, but if proud and gloomy,
It is a poison-tree, that pierced to the inmost
Weeps only tears of poison! (I.i.20–24)

Repeatedly, Coleridge explores the instructive possibilities of the tragic in his plays, by use of themes and methods that are common to his poetical, critical and philosophical works. If one aspect of the plays is clever critique of theatres, they also represent the potential for staged drama to achieve the high symbolism that Coleridge identifies in his *King Lear* lecture. Hence while I have argued that

⁸¹ G. Wilson Knight, *The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 131–2.

⁸² *Revue de Paris*, XL (1837), p. 180.

⁸³ *CL*, I, p. 650.

the plays are worthy of study in their own right, I also feel that their importance in the comprehension of Coleridge's canon is even more important than J.C.C. Mays and Julie A. Carlson claim. As a reader and author of tragedy Coleridge provides tools not only for the interpretation of his works but for how he perceived himself as an author and a man. The whole experience of staging plays typifies how Coleridge dramatizes himself as an embattled, tragic character who triumphs over adversity. He undergoes a melancholy struggle to have *Remorse* staged at all after the disappointment with Sheridan. At Drury Lane, Coleridge's material generated strong reviews even though some members of the production were so inept that the wrong character killed Ordonio on opening night, due to misreading Coleridge's handwriting.⁸⁴ In his authorship of plays for the theatre, and his self-alignment with Hamlet, we glimpse under-explored aspects of Coleridge's most lengthily constructed tragic creation: himself as sage.

⁸⁴ On the opening night of *Remorse* at Drury Lane, Naomi killed Ordonio, due to an error in transcription from Coleridge's manuscript. In subsequent performances, Alhadra killed Ordonio. See *CL*, III, p. 428.

Chapter 6

The Tragic Sage

In a diary entry of 1930, W.B. Yeats contemplates Coleridge's metamorphosis from a poet into a sage:

From 1807 or so he seems to have some kind of illumination which was, as always, only in part communicable. The end attained in such a life is not a truth or even a symbol of truth, but a oneness with some spiritual being or beings. It is this that fixes our amazed attention on Oedipus when his death approaches, and upon some few historical men. It is because the modern philosopher has not sought this that he remains unknown to those multitudes who thought his predecessors sacred.¹

The 'illumination' of Coleridge that Yeats describes is of a kind that he depicts in his own translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (1934). The aged exile Oedipus gains a sudden insight, in which he foretells own his death and overcomes blindness: 'It is my turn to guide those that long have been their father's guide; come, come, but lay no hand upon me; all unhelped I shall discover my predestined plot of ground, my sacred tomb' (ll. 1195–8). Oedipus' power of prophecy originates in his kinship with divinity. Apollo has cursed him, but is now the source of Oedipus' enlightenment: 'My knowledge comes from Phoebus and his father God most high, aye, from truth itself' (622–4). Rush Rehm glosses the transformation and the ambivalence of Oedipus himself, who is not only prophetic but powerful: 'The blind beggar has metamorphosed into a prophet who foresees the future, and guarantees it via his curses, benedictions, and the enduring presence of his corpse in the soil of Colonus.'²

Coleridge's assumption of the role of a sage is familiar to scholarship. The sense of Coleridge's metamorphosis from young poet into older sage is not a modern perception, but was observed at the end of his lifetime. Seamus Perry notes the importance after Coleridge's death of the popular *Table Talk*. First published in 1835, this selection presents Coleridge's intelligence as coherent and accomplished. 'Coleridge emerges from these pages', Perry observes, 'as hugely wide-ranging; gifted with an immense memory and the command of extraordinary fields of knowledge; religiously respectable, broadly Tory.'³ The dutiful documentation of the *Table Talk* alone is evidence of Coleridge's sagely status.

¹ W.B. Yeats, *Explorations*, ed. by Mrs W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 32.

² Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus*, ed. by R.C. Jebb, *Classic Commentaries on Latin & Greek Texts* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), p. 33.

³ Seamus Perry, 'The Talker' in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, pp. 103–25 (p. 104).

Typically, Coleridge's sagacity is plotted as a sort of ideological destination in the evolution of his thought. Commentators tend to agree that Coleridge becomes a sage during his residence at Highgate. There is a prevailing image from this period of Coleridge the invalid, dispensing wisdom from his sick-bed, attended upon by admiring disciples. John Beer suggests that the origin of the appellation 'Sage of Highgate' is an article written by Thomas Carlyle following Coleridge's death: '[Carlyle] did not, so far as I know, "christen" Coleridge "the Sage of Highgate", though the phrase is no doubt based on his description of him there as "like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battles"'.⁴ Rosemary Ashton entitles a chapter of her biography 'Coleridge the Sage: *Aids to Reflection* 1821–25'.⁵ In an interpretation of *Aids to Reflection* David Boulger detects Coleridge's obsession with the 'ignored seer', and evokes Cassandra and the prophet Tiresias to suggest mystical insight, like Ashton's title.⁶ Both J.C.C. Mays and Adam Sisman describe Coleridge's progressive self-identification with the Ancient Mariner, which intimates evolution towards the wise, embattled exile, if not the realization of a self-fulfilling prophecy that Coleridge has made of his own senescence.⁷

Although it accords roughly with dominant depictions of Coleridge as sage, Yeats's conception also differs importantly. First, Yeats dates the moment of Coleridge's 'illumination' as 1807, a year in which Coleridge turned only 35 and long prior to his residence at Highgate. Secondly, Yeats's date of 1807 connects Coleridge's transformation into a sage explicitly to a period of crisis. Coleridge's only significant composition of this year is his response to Wordsworth's recitation of part of *The Prelude*, entitled 'To William Wordsworth'. As he praises Wordsworth, Coleridge confesses intimidation at his friend's ability, which culminates in a conviction that his own creative death is in process:

Flowers

Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my Bier,
In the same Coffin, for the self-same Grave!
(*'To William Wordsworth'*, ll. 73–5)

My inference from Yeats is that the sage is inherently tragic. Hence Coleridge does not merely achieve a general resemblance to the weary Oedipus, but attains sagacity in a similar manner through *tlemosyne*, heroic endurance of what he feels as crises. I argue that Coleridge perceives and plays up to this resemblance. Yet while he dramatizes his sagacity, the experiences that originate Coleridge the sage are often sincere disappointments. For example, when he appeals to the principles

⁴ John Beer, Letter to *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 35:152 (1987) 530–31 (p. 530).

⁵ Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography*, Blackwell Critical Biographies (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 344–65.

⁶ David Boulger, *Coleridge as Religious Thinker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 5.

⁷ *PW* I.1, pp. 365–8; Adam Sisman, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Friendship* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 203.

of Necessitarianism after the death of his son Berkeley in 1799, Coleridge reveals to his wife his desperation to extract some consolatory lesson or benefit from the bereavement:

That God works by *general* laws are to me words without meaning or worse than meaningless—Ignorance and Imbecillity, and Limitation must wish in generals—What and who are these horrible shadows necessity and general law, to which God himself must offer *sacrifices*—hecatombs of Sacrifices?—I feel a deep conviction that these shadows exist not.⁸

The sage arises in response to such desolation. Much as he converts unfinished poems to mysterious publications as fragments, Coleridge's enactment of the sage enables him to rehabilitate failure and hardship as tokens of merit by which he has attained wisdom.

To Yeats the creative death Coleridge articulates in his poem 'To William Wordsworth' occasions a rebirth. Sensitive to Coleridge's propensity to attempt self-transformation, Yeats values Coleridge's poetic discouragement as the origin of the wise author of *The Friend*.⁹ Anthony John Harding examines a similar moment of reinvention during the Highgate years, and states explicitly that Coleridge apprehends that a programme of mentorship could be a direct alternative to a career as a published author.¹⁰ However, both Yeats as fellow philosopher-poet and Harding as modern critic, as they celebrate Coleridge's rebirth as sage, neglect his continued status as a poet. Coleridge composed verse until the end of his life, and saw an edition of his poems through the press as late as 1829. I dispute Yeats's implication that Coleridge could not be a sage and a poet simultaneously. I contend that the two identities are closely related, and that poetry informs Coleridge's perception that the sage is a role to be enacted. Further, I argue that the tragic sage is detectable in Coleridge's life and works throughout his literary career.

Coleridge's educative, sagacious impulse does not arise at Highgate or in 1807 but earlier still in various endeavours. It is manifest in lectures and poetry, and tuition and the ministry were schemes to which Coleridge contemplated resorting several times. Charles Lloyd became a friend, a collaborator and subsequently an enemy of Coleridge, but was initially his pupil in 1796. In 1797 Coleridge announced a prospective 'project of Tuition' in collaboration with Basil Montagu.¹¹ In 1798 he considered relocation to become a preacher.

In an earlier chapter I demonstrated Coleridge's use of allusion to tragic literature to identify his age as tragic. The same strategy also places Coleridge alongside Sophocles, Shakespeare and Milton as a tragic artist. Further, Yeats's

⁸ CL, I, p. 482.

⁹ For Yeats's identification with Coleridge see Matthew Gibson, *Yeats, Coleridge and the Romantic Sage* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Anthony John Harding, 'Coleridge as mentor and the origins of masculinist modernity', *European Romantic Review*, 14:4 (2003), 453–66 (p. 457).

¹¹ CL, I, p. 361.

identification of Coleridge with Oedipus corroborates a number of commentators on, and statements by, Coleridge, which demonstrate his tendency for self-dramatization. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), with phrasing that connects the 'Ancient Mariner' to Greek tragedy, William Hazlitt depicts Coleridge the lecturer, who seems to have become Oedipus or Orestes in his rhapsody: 'As the impassioned critic speaks and rises in his theme, you would think you heard the voice of the Man hated by the Gods, contending with the wild winds as they roar, and his eye glitters with the spirit of Antiquity!'¹²

In his poem 'The Old Philosopher' (1868) William Prowse parodies the importance Coleridge attaches to his didactic poetry and metaphysical lessons. Prowse is also sensitive to the performative nature of Coleridge's sagacity. In the guise of his own Mariner, the aged Coleridge accosts a youth in order to philosophize:

It is an old philosopher
 He stoppeth one of three:—
 'By thy gleaming face and snowy hair,
 Now, wherefore stop'st thou me?'
 He held aloft a mystic scroll
 With the letters 'S.T.C.!'

'Subjectively, the Logos,' said,
 The aged man, says he,
 'Explains the supra-sensual base
 Of all philosophee!'
 'No doubt you're right,' his friend replied,
 'But what is that to me?'

'I shot the Albatross!' pursued
 The chatty veteran.
 'The deuce you did!' exclaimed his friend;
 'It was a daring plan!
 Who was this Albert Ross? And who
 Are you, you rum old man?'
 ('The Old Philosopher. By a Literary Medium', ll. 1–18)

Tom Mayberry notes the 'air of theatricality' in Coleridge's *conversazione*, evenings from 1824–29 in which Coleridge appeared in almost clerical dress, to dispense obscure wisdom.¹³ Coleridge's casual remark that he has 'a smack of Hamlet' exemplifies further his self-dramatization in middle age, but this kinship with tragic figures is evident throughout his life.

¹² *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, VII: *Liber Amoris* (1823); *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), p. 101.

¹³ Tom Mayberry, 'S.T. Coleridge, Edwin Atherstone and the Grove *Conversazione*: Some Newly-Discovered Letters', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 18 (2001), 43–52 (p. 47).

Repeatedly, Coleridge emphasizes the failures and difficulties in his own life, which he presents as revelatory or educational experiences. In 1796 Coleridge writes to Charles Lloyd's father to argue for his suitability as a mentor for Lloyd on political grounds: 'I have myself erred greatly in this respect; but, I trust, I have now seen my error. I have accordingly snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition, and have hung up its fragments in the chamber of Penitences.' Coleridge foregrounds instances of failure and disillusionment, which he sees as assets that qualify him as advisor to the naïve Lloyd. That Coleridge's declaration is a histrionic flourish is demonstrated by his repetition of the same paragraph, virtually verbatim, in a letter to George Coleridge more than one year later.¹⁴ Neil Vickers shows that Coleridge regards his own illness as 'a blessing in disguise', and dramatizes his poor health as an ordeal 'in advance of medical science'.¹⁵ Contemporary discussions of scrofula allow Coleridge to ennoble both his disease and his studies as acts of martyrdom. He believes 'that his bodily condition was caused by certain kinds of mental operation', and writes that 'Virtue & Genius' produce scrofula.¹⁶ By 1807 Coleridge has come to regard his own experience of opium as exemplary: 'I shall deem it a sacred Duty to publish my case'.¹⁷ A recurrent figure in Coleridge's works is the carefully constructed persona of the tragic artist who, 'illuminated' by hardship, is a justified commentator on catastrophe. Coleridge uses this figure to articulate his own anxieties about authorship and to establish his authority as a source of guidance.

Friends identify Coleridge's aspirations to sagacity even in youth. In 1798 Charles Lamb writes to Coleridge derisively with a parodic list of queries on theology:

Learned Sir, my Friend,
Presuming on our long habits of friendship and emboldened further by your late liberal permission to avail myself of your correspondence, in case I want any knowledge (which I intend to do when I have no Encyclopedia, or Lady's Magazine at hand to refer to in any matter of science), I now submit to your enquiries the above Theological Propositions.¹⁸

Lamb is attuned not only to Coleridge's confidence in his own knowledge and verbose rhetoric but, most characteristic of the sage, his assumed entitlement to instruct others. Further, the aspirant sage is evident in the various forms of instruction undertaken by Coleridge, which include Coleridge the lecturer, as mentor of Charles Lloyd and as the potential founder of his own 'project of

¹⁴ *CL*, I, pp. 240, 397.

¹⁵ Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors: 1795–1806*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89; *CL*, II, p. 902.

¹⁷ *CL*, III, p. 125.

¹⁸ *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. by Edwin W. Marris, 3 vols (London: Cornell University Press, 1975–78), I (1975), p. 128.

Tuition' with Basil Montagu. William Hazlitt recalls Coleridge's sermon in Wem in 1798 as a kind of performance:

The preacher [...] launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind [...]. To show the fatal effects of war, [he] drew a striking contrast between a the simple shepherd-boy [...], and the same poor country-lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-boy [...], and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood.¹⁹

Thus even early in Coleridge's life there is adequate evidence for John Holloway's claim that Coleridge is the 'founder in modern England of [a] kind of thought' that Holloway attributes to the Victorian sage. Coleridge intends the role for himself, while Holloway studies the progress of a tradition, but Holloway is right to note that Coleridge becomes a model for later sages. The sage's function is 'to express notions about the world, man's situation in it and how he should live', and he is typified by 'earnestness and oracular prose' and 'prophetic utterances'.²⁰

The Model Sage and the Doomed Prophet

The economic and political issues of England during the 1790s are well established contexts for the themes of Romanticism: Britain was at war with France, xenophobia led to fears of French invasion, food shortages occurred and the government imposed restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Thomas Pfau provides a useful evaluation of the resultant social-tension, a 'paranoia' which he defines not as 'pathological', but as 'a situation of extreme interpretive agitation and urgency': 'Paranoia constitutes both the paradigmatic mood of the 1790s in England and the most effective rhetorical strategy for containing – in the modality of an embattled, lucidly defensive inwardness – the anxious perception of history as a welter of uncontrollable and malevolent forces.'²¹ This widespread 'paranoia' is consistent with the group psychology of animal magnetism posited by Mesmer, which fascinates Coleridge.²² In the atmosphere Pfau depicts, I argue, Coleridge identifies society's need for an exemplary figure.

Rather than create an engaged, combative champion of freedom, as William Blake does in the revolutionary figure of Orc, Coleridge chooses as exemplar the withdrawn, wise and embattled philosopher-poet, an ideal version of the figure he aspires to in the aforementioned letters and lectures. This is the tragic sage

¹⁹ *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, IX: *On the Education of Women* (1815); *Mr Coleridge's 'Christabel'* (1816), pp. 96–7.

²⁰ John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1953; repr. Archon Books, 1962), pp. 1–4.

²¹ Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 77–81.

²² Holloway notes that animal magnetism is 'typical of the sage's notion of his own insights and how to communicate them.' *The Victorian Sage*, p. 6.

who is learned, displays his misfortunes as didactic credentials and possesses an enigmatic proximity to the divine that both inspires his instructive utterances and enables him as a hierophant, an interpreter of prophecy and divine will.

The frequency with which the tragic sage appears in Coleridge's works demonstrates his determination to define his duty as poet in terms of moral purpose and cathartic effect on his audience, and to establish grounds for his assumption of the role. In *Remorse*, Alvar is a 'painter of fancies' and, as I have argued, a director of tragic drama. The visionary speaker-poet of 'Kubla Khan' recalls a lost paradise and creates terror as his words not only foretell the retrieval of the former kingdom, but intimate their potential to recreate Xanadu tangibly: the speaker has too much power. In 'The Nightingale', in which Coleridge preaches the 'different lore' of life in retirement, the poet makes a public declaration that he has rejected society. The poet's legitimacy as educator is corroborated by the juxtaposed figure of the 'night-wandering man' whose misfortunes seem tellingly autobiographical ('The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem', ll. 41, 16). In 'Christabel', Bard Bracy's prophetic dream of a dove with 'a bright green Snake | Coil'd around its Wings and Neck' establishes the poet as a seer, possessing uncanny intimations of Geraldine's insidious control over Christabel and the threat to Sir Leoline's court (549–50). In the undated 'Sonnet: To Nature', Coleridge is 'priest of [a] poor sacrifice', burdened with a duty to identify 'lessons' and sources of joy in nature, despite a 'world [that] rings | In mock of this belief' ('Sonnet: To Nature', ll. 14, 5–7). This mockery glorifies Coleridge's task with adversity, but also demonstrates the necessity for a mediator between the divinity of nature and the society that has neglected it, to its own spiritual atrophy.

The most famous of Coleridge's tragic sages is the Ancient Mariner, an Oedipal character who recounts his exemplary tragic victimhood in verse. Coleridge's gradual identification of himself with the Mariner is not indicative of his realization of autobiographical content in the poem. Instead I believe the increasing likeness demonstrates that in the text Coleridge devises a model for himself and idealizes the process by which the sage makes revelations and is received by his audience. Hence, Coleridge's kinship with the Mariner becomes explicit only as Coleridge achieves success, later in life. He achieves the status of sage and thus emulates his model. Derided initially as insane, a 'Loon', the Mariner enthralls the Wedding-Guest, who listens to the full account and is moved by its morality and pathos (11). The poem's conclusion indicates Coleridge's benefit from such a transaction: the speaker is no longer merely a self-vaunted prophet who boasts powers of revelation, but has been accepted as wise and credible. Declarations of self-sacrifice, which resonate with a wish for recognition, remain constant in Coleridge's works.

Models of the sage appear in Coleridge's writing as early as 1795. In the 'Allegoric Vision' the narrator encounters a pilgrim who describes a parabolic vision in a dream. He is an embattled man allegorized by the rugged, masculine setting, the 'weather-stained' walls and stone furnishings of the chapel in which the two seek refuge ('Allegoric Vision', ll. 28–9). The narrator notes the enigmatic melancholy of the pilgrim, in whom he detects hardships that, having been

overcome, empower him as a messenger of endurance and hope: ‘Amid the gloom of the storm and in the duskiness of that place he sate like an emblem on a rich man’s sepulchre, or like a mourner on the sodden grave of an only one—an aged mourner, who is watching the wained moon and sorroweth not (44–7).’

As he progresses towards the ideal model of the Mariner, intimations of the sage occur in Coleridge’s epistolary dedication to Thomas Poole of the ‘Ode on the Departing Year’ in its first publication as a pamphlet in 1796. Keen to present himself as an interpreter of history, a seer of the future and a messenger of redemption, Coleridge uses his public address to Poole to express his desired eminence. Both poet and prophet, he suffers for his art. Coleridge declares that he has fought off ‘a rheumatic complaint’ to complete his composition, and pre-empt accusations of pretension with a typical, rhetorical flourish. Although ostensibly he addresses Poole, Coleridge challenges his reader’s knowledge of Classical literature, and implies that to question Coleridge’s sagacity is to demonstrate less cultivation than he and Poole possess: ‘You, I am sure, will not fail to recollect, that among the Ancients, the Bard and the Prophet were one and the same character; and you *know*, that although I prophesy curses, I pray fervently for blessings.’²³ The argument affixed to the poem in 1797 reiterates Coleridge’s position as suffering artist and the prophetic intentions of the poem, in which ‘the second Epode prophesies in anguish of spirit the downfall of this country.’²⁴ He watches calamitous history unfold, pained that he can foretell catastrophe but not alter it.

In ‘Religious Musings’ Coleridge uses another framing device to increase the reader’s estimation of his visionary powers. In this case he uses the title: Coleridge dissembles about the date of the poem’s composition to exaggerate his prophetic gift. Although the first published version of the poem appeared in 1796 and includes revisions made that March, Coleridge entitles the work ‘Religious Musings. A Desultory Poem, Written on the Christmas Eve of 1794.’ The effect of the earlier date is that Coleridge seems uncannily to have anticipated – rather than documented retrospectively – some incidents narrated in the poem. For example, Ian Wylie claims that the work alludes to the protest over food prices in 1795 that culminated in a projectile passing through the King’s carriage as he travelled to the theatre.²⁵ Coleridge depicts the incident from the perspective of the man, starved to desperation, who attacks the King:

O thou poor Wretch,
Who nurs’d in darkness and made wild by want
Roamest for prey, yea thy unnatural hand
Dost lift to deeds of blood!
(‘Religious Musings’, ll. 278–81)

Composed in 1796, Coleridge affects to have foretold this episode with the date of 1794.

²³ *PW*, I.1, pp. 302–3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II.1, p. 415.

²⁵ *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature*, p. 104.

Preoccupied with Britain's war with France, the slave trade and the efforts of Catherine the Great of Russia and Friedrich William II of Prussia to control Europe, both 'Religious Musings' and the 'Ode on the Departing Year' manifest Coleridge's millenarian concerns. Both poems foretell catastrophe and eventual redemption, and thus fit typically into the framework of his tragic vision. In 'Religious Musings' Coleridge's Unitarian belief in Christ's mortality does not greatly hinder a typical use of the crucifixion as redemptive; the 'self-annihilated' soul is united with God, and 'Wrath' becomes 'medicinal' (43, 84–5). In the 'Departing Year', Coleridge claims that the destruction of Albion is 'predestin'd', it is 'doom'd to fall, enslav'd and vile', but he consoles himself finally as he emerges harrowed by these visions, 'cleans'd from the fleshly Passions that bedim | God's Image' (155, 129, 169–70).

Evaluation of Coleridge's assumption of authority as an interpreter of catastrophe and foreteller of amelioration necessitates an examination of his views on inspiration, a theme recovered as significant in Romantic discourse and salient in subsequent scholarship. Jeffrey W. Barbeau establishes the importance of John Coleridge's *Miscellaneous Dissertations* (1768) as a work that informs his son's conception of 'prophets, gifted with divine insight, [who] know future events'.²⁶ From Barbeau's study I proceed to wonder about a question of lineage, whether Coleridge might place himself as an inheritor in a line of prophetic thinkers, although I do not find immediate evidence for this and Barbeau does not address it. Harding assesses the larger context of discussion, and situates Coleridge's philosophy of inspiration thus: '[Coleridge] participated in the late eighteenth-century rediscovery of the oracular voice, which was closely linked with the rediscovery of Hebrew poetry as well as with the revaluation of Greek oracular poets such as Pindar and of prophetic poets in the English tradition such as Spenser and Milton.'²⁷ Central to this debate was the question of whether the authors of the scriptures were moved by God to write or were merely documenters of divine revelation, and hence whether the word of God as transmitted by a lay person was affected by the imperfection of its medium. The debate was not confined to Biblical studies but extended to all creativity, and the earliest textual-origins of the questions were non-Christian: in *Ion*, Plato has Socrates question the experience of the eponymous rhapsode, who boasts of his talent. Ultimately, Socrates forces Ion to concede that his recitation is solely the consequence of godly inspiration, a daemonic force: 'It's as someone divine, and not as master of a profession, that you are a singer of Homer's praises'.²⁸ Romantic discourse advances the question of creativity with dual theories which insist that a combination of inspiration and

²⁶ Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion*, Nineteenth-Century Major Lives and Letters (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 150–51.

²⁷ Anthony John Harding, *Coleridge and the Inspired Word* (Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), p. 7.

²⁸ *Ion*, trans. by Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 937–49 (p. 949, section 542[b]).

human agency is required. Among the most famous of these is Wordsworth's description in the 'Preface' to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* of the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', tempered by the requirement that these feelings are controlled, or 'recollected in tranquillity'.

Theories on inspiration during the Romantic period were not consistent, and commentators such as Thomas Paine and William Blake seek to challenge popular hypotheses of its occurrence. Paine refutes the significance attached to prophecy, and claims that 'the word *prophet* was the Bible word for poet'. Paine's concern over the credulity of the populace is evident in his derision of the belief that 'every thing unintelligible was prophetic':

It is consistent to believe that the event so communicated would be told in terms that could be understood, and not related in such a loose and obscure manner as to be out of the comprehension of those that heard it, and so equivocal as to fit almost any circumstance that might happen afterwards. It is conceiving very irreverently of the Almighty that he would deal in this jesting manner with mankind.²⁹

Similarly, in 'All Religions are One' (1788), Blake claims that 'Poetic Genius [...] is every where call'd the Spirit of prophecy.' In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), Blake reports Isaiah's claim that he 'saw no God', and the prophet agrees with the poet's definition of prophecy as a 'firm perswasion'. Hence Ian Balfour opines that Blake 'expands the notion of prophecy so widely as to include any human utterance spoken from conviction', although this is complicated by the irony that, in the account of dining with Ezekiel, Blake himself is reporting a visionary experience. Hence Blake does not refute mysticism, but arrogates it even to the extent of denying that Biblical authors possessed the same privilege as his own moments of vision.³⁰

Coleridge, who did not assist Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* and whose theoretical input is difficult to ascertain, has a less assured relation to the question of inspiration than Wordsworth's. Coleridge's position is comparable to Blake's: he wishes to establish his own visionary experience as valid. Unlike Blake, Coleridge does not dispute the mystical interpretation of Biblical prophecy, but Coleridge too wishes to distinguish himself from spurious visionaries or 'enthusiasts', as I shall discuss subsequently. Primarily I draw attention to Coleridge's uneasiness concerning his own inspiration. Attracted to the magical, daemonic experience of *poesis*, he fears the possibility of delusion and the threat inspiration entails to Reason, which is later the foundation of Coleridge's theory of Imagination. Timothy Clark also detects this tension in Coleridge's attitude to inspiration; that he is liberated by the drug-like experience

²⁹ *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. by Moncure D. Conway, 4 vols (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894-96), IV (1896), pp. 36, 81-2.

³⁰ Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 132.

and the connections of thought that occur in spontaneous composition, but does not wish to relinquish the status he accords to his own intellect.³¹

According to Thomas McFarland, Coleridge believes that God did not solely dictate to the Biblical authors but that ‘the light of truth shone behind and through their time-bound and dimly perceived efforts’.³² However, Coleridge is not nearly as decided as McFarland implies. As late as 1826 Coleridge addresses the inspiration of biblical authors in a manner that is uncertain. While he identifies a distinction between *pneuma* (spirit) and *logos* (word or argument), Coleridge is unclear on when or how the two interact. He makes vague allusion to the process of inspiration and its relation to ‘Miraculous dictation’, and adopts hesitant, modalizing phrases: ‘I too contend for their Inspiration, but I contend, that πνεῦμα and λογος are distinct operations, that may or may not be united in the same act, and that Inspiration is not in all cases accompanied by, much less the same with, *Miraculous dictation*.’³³ Comparably, Harding is correct to detect that Barbeau assumes a consistency of viewpoint that Coleridge does not possess.³⁴ Uncertainty troubles the tragic sage in Coleridge’s poetical works. He is unsure of the true nature of inspiration. His visionary experience is a form of madness and he fears ridicule as one who is deluded, an enthusiast. Coleridge’s claim in the ‘Departing Year’ that he speaks with ‘no unholy madness’ is not a denial that it is madness (10).

What I mean by the ‘madness’ that afflicts the tragic sage needs careful explanation, although the definition of the word has not changed significantly since Coleridge’s time. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Michel Foucault cites the late sixteenth-century belief that ‘melancholia and dreams have the same origin and bear, in relation to truth, the same value.’ Both dreams and melancholy were perceived to be potentially prophetic as well as retrospective. Commentators considered a powerful experience of either as a sign of godly inspiration or insanity. Additionally the former could induce the latter. Foucault documents the continuation of such scholarship on madness into the seventeenth century:

There is also a melancholia which permits the sufferer to predict the future, to speak in an unknown language, to see beings ordinarily invisible; this melancholia originates in a supernatural intervention, the same which brings to the sleeper’s mind those dreams which foresee the future, announce events to come, and cause him to see ‘strange things.’³⁵

³¹ Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997; repr. 2000), pp. 147, 3.

³² *OM*, p. lxxiv.

³³ *CL*, VI, p. 617.

³⁴ Review of Coleridge, *the Bible, and Religion*, in *The Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 33 (2009), 133–7.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967; repr. Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2006), pp. 95–8.

In eighteenth-century thought, Foucault argues, this tradition is modified by acknowledgement of the possibility that the madman deceives himself rather than suffering deception from an external source. Such delusion, as I shall discuss, is a cause of anxiety in Coleridge's prophetic writings. In response to Foucault's view of madness, Jacques Derrida claims that, although he attempts to proceed otherwise, Foucault upholds an absolute distinction between madness and sanity. Thus Foucault succumbs to the very separation of the two as opposites that he has criticized as a social construct. Derrida claims therefore that Foucault demonstrates a view that 'the opposition of reason to its other is *symmetrical*'.³⁶ The interpretation of madness in Greek tragedy presented by Ruth Padel is more akin to Derrida's view than Foucault's: 'Greek images present madness not as "opposite" to reason and right order, but astray from it.'³⁷ When Derrida corrects Foucault's interpretation of eighteenth-century scholarship, he adumbrates a perspective on insanity during the Romantic period that accords with the treatment Padel detects in Hellenic thought. Thus scholarly opinions on madness during Coleridge's lifetime are compatible with its presentation in Greek tragedy. This commonality is important because it facilitates Coleridge's use of Greek tragedy to explore his own powers of insight and to set up paradigms of sagacity.

In the 'Ode on the Departing Year' Coleridge captures his sentiments on prophecy, inspiration, madness and tragedy in an epigraph quoted from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. In this first play of the *Oresteia*, Agamemnon returns victorious from the Trojan War but is murdered by his wife, Clytaemnestra. The Trojan princess Cassandra is in Agamemnon's entourage, captured as a prize. Chosen as a lover by Apollo, Cassandra was blessed with the gift of prophecy. Subsequently displeased by her, Apollo now ensures that Cassandra's revelations will not be believed. Coleridge quotes from the scene in which Agamemnon enters his house. Cassandra foretells his death, translated as follows:

The pain, the terror! The birth-pang of the seer
who tells the truth –

it whirls me, oh,
the storm comes again, the crashing chords!

[...]

and soon you'll see it face to face
and say the seer was all too true.

You will be moved with pity.³⁸

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Cogito and the History of Madness' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Routledge Classics, 2005), pp. 36–76 (p. 48).

³⁷ Ruth Padel, *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 138.

³⁸ Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, trans. by Robert Fagles (London: Wildwood House 1976; repr. Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 151–3. Coleridge omits Aeschylus' word for 'pity' (*oikteiras*) from his quotation, but it is restored in the 1834 edition of his works.

Coleridge's identification with Cassandra has two effects on the reader. The first is simply to emphasize the grandeur of his theme. Coleridge's use of Aeschylus corresponds to William Hazlitt's suggestion that to invoke Greek tragedy dignifies a work: 'Antigone, in Sophocles, waiting near the grove of Furies – Electra, in Aeschylus, offering sacrifice at the tomb of Agamemnon – are classical subjects, because the circumstances and the characters have a correspondent dignity, and an immediate interest, from their mere designation.'³⁹ Subsequently, Thomas De Quincey claims in his 'theory of Greek Tragedy' (1840) that Cassandra is suited specifically to this purpose: 'A prophetic colouring, a colouring of ancient destiny, connected with a character or an event, has the effect of exalting and ennobling [...]. Cassandra was brought upon the stage [...] to confer the solemn and mysterious hoar of a dark prophetic woe upon the dreadful catastrophe.'⁴⁰ If De Quincey betrays cynicism concerning the contrivance of using Cassandra thus, it may be due to his association of Cassandra with Coleridge. In an undated manuscript, after a claim that 'obscurity' is a 'vice, common to Coleridge and Wordsworth', De Quincey remarks, 'C. under curse of Cassandra as to profundity'.⁴¹

The second effect of Coleridge's alignment with Cassandra is to impart his sense that she is a kindred figure. Padel assesses the reasons for readers to associate themselves with such characters as Cassandra in terms that are typical to studies of Coleridge and illustrate the psychological depth of his relationship to Greek tragedy: 'Faced with madness and self-destruction in their own life, they found the thought consoling that such violent lonely paths were trodden and explained in an ancient past.'⁴² Yeats suggests a more desirable, mystical experience, in which Coleridge's drug addiction enables him to retrieve the Dionysian mentality of ancient tragedy: 'perhaps Coleridge [took] opium to recover a state which, some centuries earlier, was accessible to the fixed attention of normal man.'⁴³

Of Cassandra's brief appearance in Greek tragedy, Seth L. Schein comments that 'it is a "mad-scene" [...]. When she finally does speak, her first sounds are only cries of pain, grammatically unarticulated, followed by riddling puns and questions.'⁴⁴ Cassandra's gift is an affliction; she is both a commentator on tragedy and a tragic figure within it. It is a similar position to that Coleridge claims in the prefaces to the 'Ode on the Departing Year' to inform the reader of his discomfort, and that the Mariner inhabits, whose account of torment is itself a source of torment, a *mise-en-abyme* of tragic suffering:

³⁹ *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, V: A Letter to William Gifford, Esq., (1819)*, p. 326.

⁴⁰ *The Works of Thomas De Quincey, XX* (2003), ed. by Frederick Burwick, David Graves, Grevel Lindop, and others, p. 495.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XI (2003), ed. by Julian North, pp. 372–3.

⁴² *Whom Gods Destroy*, pp. 6–7.

⁴³ *Explorations*, p. 299.

⁴⁴ Seth L. Schein, 'The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*', *Greece & Rome*, Second Series, 29:1 (1982), 11–16 (pp. 11–13).

Since then at an uncertain hour,
 Now oftimes and now fewer,
 That anguish comes and makes me tell
 My ghastly aventure. (582–582.1.3)

Coleridge's self-comparison with Cassandra indicates that the tragic sage experiences moments of mystical possession and lucid vision. However, while association with Cassandra provides a lineage for Coleridge's prophecy, it also reveals his anxiety. While he undergoes a type of madness, the sage is ennobled by the discomfort that accompanies his inspiration and is validated by the eventual verification of his revelations. In *King Oedipus*, the prophet Tiresias is consulted to explain the famine that afflicts Thebes. When he reveals that Oedipus has incurred the gods' displeasure, the king dismisses Tiresias as deluded. Later Tiresias is proved correct, and so demonstrates his entitlement to revered status in Theban civic life. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra enjoys no such veneration: she is an outsider, cursed to be disbelieved. Hence, I suggest two models in Coleridge's thought: Cassandra, who represents Coleridge's fear that his wisdom goes unheeded, and Tiresias, model for the Mariner, whose insight is recognized.

Evidently Coleridge is aware that to pretend to the role of sage risks not only failure to obtain respect, but accusations of delusion. In 'The Eolian Harp' (1796), Coleridge's visionary flight culminates in the introduction of his censorious wife who, as a representative of conventional piety and the quotidian, restricts his speculations on the mind of God:

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
 Darts, O beloved woman! nor such thoughts
 Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,
 And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
 ('The Eolian Harp', ll. 49–52)

Other of Coleridge's sages incur equally negative associations. The poet of 'Kubla Khan' is feared. In the fragment 'Mahomet' (1799) Coleridge invokes inspiration to meditate on its effects, mindful that this force rendered Mohammed a *pharmakos*, both a positive and a destructive agent:

Utter the Song, O my Soul! the flight and return of Mohammed,
 Prophet and Priest, who scatter'd abroad both Evil and Blessing.
 ('Mahomet: A Fragment', ll. 1–2)

Coleridge notes his anxiety that 'Prophets' and 'Fetisch-Worshippers' can be subject to the same 'Influence' in the draft notes for this poem.⁴⁵ In Coleridge's translations of Schiller's plays, he studies the effects of a false hierophant, as Wallenstein misinterprets the revelations of the astrologer Seni to his ruin. In *The Piccolomini*, Wallenstein explains that he trusts Octavio because of 'his horoscope',

⁴⁵ *PW*, I, p. 570.

and thereafter keeps faith with a man who will turn against him (I.ix.16). Finally, Wallenstein's pride causes him to reject true prophecy, which contradicts his own forebodings. He ignores the fears of the Countess, who dreamed that he seized her with a cold hand: 'there seem'd | A crimson covering to envelope us' (*The Death of Wallenstein*, V.i.116–24). Wallenstein attributes Seni's final warning of imminent treachery from the Swedes to a prejudice against them (V.iii.27–30).

The accusation that Coleridge fears is enthusiasm, which Jon Mee defines: 'To believe oneself to have an immediate relationship with one's God, to believe oneself able to apprehend his will directly, or be his particular favourite was to be guilty of enthusiasm.' Mee surveys the debate on enthusiasm in writings by Locke, Burke and Shaftesbury, and depicts the political context. Dissenters were likely to be termed enthusiasts. Coleridge's solution, Mee explains, is the 'desynonymisation of enthusiasm from fanaticism' to arrogate a legitimate form of visionary experience.⁴⁶ However, Coleridge strains to convince himself of the difference despite this distinction, and remains troubled by his own vision.

Apprehension of the charge of enthusiasm is but one aspect of Coleridge's concern of being disregarded. While he insists on the importance of his works, the fear that they will be unappreciated recurs in Coleridge's writings. In 'Religious Musings', Wylie interprets Coleridge's desire to 'join your mystic choir' as a reference to 'past and present statesmen, philosophers and poets who have received and preserved ancient Truths and whose numbers Coleridge aspired to join' (411).⁴⁷ Harding detects that this attainment is not a matter only of wisdom, inspiration or revelation, but of recognition among the populace; the attestation of oracular significance is crucial.⁴⁸ Coleridge adopts strategies to attract such verification. He emphasizes his own credibility – including the establishment of lineage by his association with the elect prophets and poets – and ridicules false prophets and unappreciative audiences. In the conclusion to 'Kubla Khan' the speaker-poet's visionary message is rejected because of his 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair'. However, the self-protective actions of the crowd are primitive spells of black magic:

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread. (51–2)

Senseless acts are committed in response to a seer who is apprehended as a madman or a demon. His gift is wasted on philistines. Thus in 'Kubla Khan' Coleridge anticipates his treatment of the subjectivity of madness in the first essay of *The Friend*, 'The Fable of the Madning Rain'.

Coleridge's second periodical resumes the discourse of his first, the short-lived publication *The Watchman* that he had produced more than a decade previously.

⁴⁶ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 9, 19.

⁴⁷ *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ *Coleridge and the Inspired Word*, p. 19.

After the publication of 10 issues in 1796, Coleridge abandoned *The Watchman* due to low subscriptions. With a dramatic exclamation of defeat, supposedly in dialogue with Ezekiel, Coleridge ennobles his disappointment by association: ‘*O Watchman! thou hast watched in vain*’.⁴⁹ In ‘The Fable of the Madning Rain’, adapted from the Latin poem by Benedetto Stay (1714–1801), Coleridge’s anxieties concerning the neglected seer are expressed in an allegorical tale that examines prophecy, the reception of revelation and the subjectivity of madness. The ‘Fable’ commences with a depiction of a Platonic ‘golden age’, a ‘blest age of dignified Innocence [...] when Conscience acted in Man with the ease and uniformity of Instinct.’ At an assembly of Elders, one speaker reveals a troubling prophecy of an imminent rain that induces insanity, but that can be avoided by seeking shelter. However, the people forget the prophecy and only the Elder who issued the warning seeks cover. When he emerges from the cavern that has protected him, the Elder finds the townsfolk mad. The people, previously ‘working towards the same aim by reason’, are now divided. Further, they deem the elder mad, whereupon he realizes that ‘IT IS IN VAIN TO BE SANE IN A WORLD OF MADMEN’. He elects to fling himself in a puddle to emerge equally mad as, ‘but no more wretched’ than his fellows.⁵⁰ This Cassandra figure resigns, and doubts the practical worth of superiority to the shared paranoia of Britain. However, the Sage of Highgate in Coleridge’s later works is evidence that Coleridge has employed more effective tactics to ensure his recognition as a Tiresian seer: suffering, possessed and prophetic, but with a revered status in society.

The Tiresian Triad: *Sibylline Leaves*, *Biographia Literaria* and *The Statesman’s Manual*

Paul Hamilton writes of *Biographia Literaria* that ‘the question for the book’s readers has always been the extent to which the accidents and exigencies of its production nevertheless emerge as an “actual” method or epistemological parable.’⁵¹ I do not believe that the overall function of *Biographia Literaria* is parabolic because, as I shall argue subsequently, it is not a practically informative book; but nor do I think that its sole purpose is the reader’s amusement. While I agree that *Biographia Literaria* is not always serious, I dispute, amid Coleridge’s castigation of reviewers and his piteous self-deprecation, that there is sufficient evidence for Kathleen M. Wheeler’s thesis that Coleridge’s intention is self-parodic and, for example, that the theories of Imagination are ‘satirical addresses to the reader’.⁵² But if *Biographia Literaria* lacks a single, obvious ‘method’,

⁴⁹ *Watchman*, p. 375.

⁵⁰ *Friend*, I, pp. 7–9.

⁵¹ Paul Hamilton, Review of *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, *The Modern Language Review*, 83:1 (1988), 153–4 (p. 154).

⁵² Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge’s ‘Biographia Literaria’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 130.

I find that there is evidence of an overall strategy in which Coleridge uses his epistemology to obtain recognition and respect.

In a previous chapter I examined the implications of the title *Sibylline Leaves*, and argued that Coleridge's identification with the Cumaean prophetess is an attempt to overcome the creative failures of his fragmentary poetical works. He presents these as intellectual puzzles that engage and improve the reader in the act of interpretation. To this I add that Coleridge's aspiration to be the sibyl, as opposed to Cassandra, marks his consciousness of the difference between society's outcast and accepted prophets. The sibyl, like Tiresias, occupies an important position that mediates between religious mysticism and banality: the sibyl is sought out and consulted, and her revelations are heeded. Thus the title *Sibylline Leaves* signals Coleridge's wish to become an active figure within society rather than a powerless critic of it. He attempts to find practical applications for his metaphysical and 'preternatural' interests. The success of these efforts, evident in the establishment of the Sage of Highgate, is consequent to developments in Coleridge's philosophy that relate specifically to his own abilities.

Behind Coleridge's new position is his initial loss of confidence in his own power of prophecy, aggravated primarily by his uneasiness over the requirement of his audience to believe his visions. In an erudite study Elinor Shaffer articulates the larger philosophical concerns that underlie this doubt: Coleridge's reading of new German criticism of the Bible, his conservative politics and his movement towards conventional Christianity.⁵³ Building on Shaffer's work, Tim Fulford demonstrates that at the time of Coleridge composing *The Statesman's Manual*, his possession of a fresh but altered belief in prophecy is evident, informed by Christian readings of the Kabbalah and Kabbalistic readings of Christianity. The actual occasion of prophetic vision is now less important than the possession of an 'esoteric inner sense', which enables conviction because Coleridge believes it is divinely bestowed.⁵⁴ Coleridge arrives at a position similar to Blake's 'firm perswasion': Coleridge does not disregard moments of supernatural vision, but accepts them only as manifestations of a constant presence. Thus to the heavenly rhapsody of the poet in *Ion* is added the serene guidance of Socrates' own daemon.

Coleridge achieves his reputation as Sage of Highgate not by inventing a new role for himself, but by different strategies that follow his revaluation of prophecy. The middle-aged conservative is readily accepted by society where the Unitarian radical was not. Yet Coleridge's pretence to sagacity has not altered significantly; this is evident in later acts of self-dramatization that are comparable to those of Coleridge's youth. The recognizable Sage of Highgate emerges in three closely contemporaneous publications, *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), *Sibylline Leaves*

⁵³ 'Kubla Khan' and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770–1880 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁵⁴ Tim Fulford, 'Coleridge, Kabbalah and the book of Daniel', in *Coleridge and the Armoury of the Human Mind: Essays on his Prose Writings*, ed. by Peter J. Kitson and Thomas N. Corns (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1991), pp. 63–77 (p. 75).

(1817) and *Biographia Literaria* (1817). To assess this appearance I wish first to review some responses to Coleridge's methods in *Biographia Literaria*.

In his classic study *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), Thomas McFarland defines Coleridge's method in *Biographia Literaria* as 'composition by mosaic organization' of others' materials. McFarland maintains a case that Coleridge is an artist rather than a plagiarist because of the deftness with which he selects and assimilates philosophies. In a position I sympathize with, Jerome Christensen is unconvinced by McFarland's theory and his declaration that 'no philosopher is original'.⁵⁵ Like Christensen I am sceptical about the merit of reproducing excerpts from other philosophers at such length as Coleridge does in *Biographia Literaria*, regardless of how diverse these passages are or how appositely chosen. I think too that McFarland's idea is unfair to the philosophers whose work Coleridge absorbs. McFarland equates Coleridge as the reader of their work with the originators. Christensen opines that McFarland's suggestion of mosaic arrangement accounts formally for Coleridge's end product but not his authorial practices: 'Although McFarland insists on the transcendent coherence of Coleridge's philosophical enterprise, he does not adequately account for the immediate, subversive effect that plagiarism and associated rhetoric strategies have on such hypothetical coherence.' Christensen considers the problem of plagiarism to be unresolved by McFarland's proposal of mosaic artistry, and proposes that *Biographia Literaria* may be understood instead as a connected sequence of marginal commentaries in which Coleridge reproduces the texts of other authors 'to supply a sustaining text that he can surround with marginalia: notes, interpolations, and revisions'. Hence *Biographia Literaria* is 'not philosophy but commentary'.⁵⁶

Setting aside Christensen's debate with McFarland on the morality of mosaic arrangement – which is not advanced, as I see it, by Christensen's hypothesis of Coleridge as marginal annotator – I wish to draw upon the temporal relationships that he indicates between author and text.⁵⁷ Coleridge narrates his past life, but the present voice, of his act of narration, is also important. Christensen argues that Coleridge, who reproduces the work of other authors, has only an intermittent presence in *Biographia Literaria*, 'similar to the dyad of decoder-code' and 'relying on the bulk of his text to relieve *him* of the responsibility for systematic discourse'.⁵⁸ I argue opposite to Christensen; I do not think that the recalled-past and narrating-present Coleridges of *Biographia Literaria* amount to the ghostly

⁵⁵ Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, pp. 27, 49.

⁵⁶ Jerome C. Christensen, 'Coleridge's Marginal Method in the *Biographia Literaria*', *PMLA*, 92:5 (1977), 928–40 (pp. 928, 931–3).

⁵⁷ Christensen's argument that *Biographia Literaria* is a marginal commentary relies on the identification of divisions between Coleridge's own prose and that assimilated from other sources. As the unacknowledged reproductions from German philosophy would not be recognized by many of Coleridge's contemporary readers, no such division between 'text' and 'commentary' would be evident as Christensen suggests.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 934.

presence I infer from Christensen's sense of diminished authorial responsibility. I find that the emphasis is actually on the 'dyad' of the book's 'code'. This is achieved using both of the text's author figures. The book is substantially retrospective, subtitled 'Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions', and offers a portrait of Coleridge in his youth. But I believe that the primary function of the text is to create a sense of the present, speaking Coleridge as sage in the reader's mind. The anecdotes and history of thought in *Biographia Literaria* form Coleridge's *curriculum vitae* as Tiresian wise man. I dispute Bradford K. Mudge's claim that 'for Coleridge, the movement from self to other implies the surrender of an active self-consciousness to a dissociated fictional construct, and with this surrender there is an accompanying loss of authority.'⁵⁹ Coleridge's 'fictional construct' is not 'dissociated' but a character selected by Coleridge, it is the sage upon which he has modelled himself since youth. Ultimately I believe that while *Biographia Literaria* lacks a single coherent method and adheres to no plan, the sum total of its content is to portray Coleridge as a sage, in some instances through recollection of his exemplary hardships, in others solely by displays of his present intellectual ability.

Christensen borrows a metaphor from Coleridge's text to term the metaphysical subjects of *Biographia Literaria* 'philosophical goods [...] transported by a rhetorical vehicle', but to me the philosophy is subservient to the rhetoric and our sense of the speaker.⁶⁰ In a text in which, as Byron has it, Coleridge fails to 'explain his Explanation', the emphasis remains upon the narrator himself rather than his subject (*Don Juan*, 'Dedication', l. 16). Walter J. Bate and James Engell observe that even the ostensibly metaphysical chapters of the *Biographia* possess a loosely autobiographical chronology that sustains the focus on Coleridge himself.⁶¹ Richard Mallette opines that Coleridge 'stands over his progeny almost tyrannically, directing the reader's encounter by means of the various poses and tones of voice he chooses to assume.'⁶² Repeatedly in the course of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge directs the reader to consider his educative hardships. Coleridge introduces himself as a public figure who finds his fame, the extent of which he exaggerates, a burden imposed by fate: 'it has been my lot to have had my name introduced both in conversation, and in print, more frequently than I find it easy to explain.' So uncontroversial a subject as Coleridge's opinion on 'the obligations of intellect' is dramatized in his declaration that 'I have seen and known enough of mankind to be well aware, that I shall perhaps stand alone in my creed.' In the failure of *The Watchman* Coleridge claims he was made a 'sufferer' by no worse fault than a 'lack of worldly knowledge', and that the folly

⁵⁹ Bradford K. Mudge, 'The Politics of Autobiography in the "Biographia Literaria"', *South Central Review*, 3:2 (1986), 27–45 (p. 28).

⁶⁰ 'Coleridge's Marginal Method in the *Biographia Literaria*', p. 933. Cf. *BL*, I, p. 290.

⁶¹ *BL*, I, p. cxxxiii.

⁶² Richard Mallette, 'Narrative Techniques in the "Biographia Literaria"', *The Modern Language Review*, 70:1 (1975), 32–40 (p. 32).

of his 'erroneous' Unitarianism is redeemed by his sincerity and good intentions.⁶³ Mallette discerns the response that Coleridge intends to elicit: 'We feel at once that here before us is a serious man of virtue and sensibility, who believes that he has been dealt an unfair blow by his adversaries and who entreats our attention to vindicate himself.'⁶⁴ Coleridge may be keen to vindicate himself, but I think that his priority is to demonstrate how his troubled past has enhanced his wisdom and his authority as narrator.

When Coleridge has demonstrated that he has been hardened and enlightened by his experiences, he raises a number of subjects that illustrate the scope and depth of his thought to complete the portrait of the sage. Timothy J. Corrigan observes Coleridge's task to establish links between science and poetry: '[Coleridge's] ease and accuracy in transferring the language of "Theory of Life"—the scientists' own inbred tongue—to *Biographia Literaria* became the most direct and effective way of illustrating the commensurability, even the authority, of both Coleridge's science and his poetics.'⁶⁵ Hence, Coleridge's analysis of poetry is based upon laws, and poetry itself is subject to a number of definitions; as a composition in which 'a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities', and which 'is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.' Coleridge casts himself not as a reader, but a scientific researcher into the constituent properties of poetry: 'I have endeavoured to discover what the qualities in a poem are.' The subsequent discussion of Wordsworth's adherence to and deviation from Coleridge's laws of poetry seem most concerned with establishing Coleridge as a thinker who makes the empirical observations, and employs the specialized vocabulary, of the scientist: 'Whatever else is combined with *metre* must [...] have [...] some property in common with poetry, as an intermedium of affinity, a sort (if I may dare borrow a well-known phrase from technical chemistry) of *mordant* between it and superadded metre.'⁶⁶

So great is Coleridge's emphasis on himself as thinker that, as he constructs himself as a sage, his arguments lose clarity. Coleridge exhibits his mental prowess at the expense of coherence. This is true even of the self-portrait of the philosopher in Chapter 12. Coleridge evokes the cruel and exemplary lessons of his past life as recounted in earlier chapters of *Biographia Literaria*, and expresses sympathy with the 'religious fanatic': 'I have a complete insight into the causes, which through the medium of his body had acted on his mind.'⁶⁷ Coleridge's appreciation of other writers' ignorance occasions a survey of the field of philosophy. With a declaration that 'it is neither possible nor necessary for all men, or for many,

⁶³ *BL*, I, pp. 5, 15, 179–80.

⁶⁴ 'Narrative Techniques in the "Biographia Literaria"', p. 33.

⁶⁵ Timothy J. Corrigan, 'Biographia Literaria and the Language of Science', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41:3 (1980), 399–419 (p. 407).

⁶⁶ *BL*, II, pp. 11–13, 19, 71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 232–3.

to be PHILOSOPHERS', Coleridge insists on the existence of a '*philosophic consciousness*' in 'all reflecting beings'. Thus he both argues for the importance of his work and dissuades others from the emulation of it. The number of worthy philosophers dwindles further by Coleridge's distinction between '*transcendental*' philosophy, which operates 'on the other side of the spontaneous consciousness' to quotidian thought, and '*transcendent*' philosophy of 'lawless speculation' which lacks real-world predicates and is 'abandoned by *all* distinct consciousness'.

Although his source is Kant, Coleridge intimates a longer lineage for his argument with a claim that the distinction between 'transcendent' and 'transcendental' 'is observed by our elder divines and philosophers'. Coleridge anticipates his distinction between the *pneuma* of inspiration and the *logos* of its expression: transcendental philosophy validates the abstraction of Coleridge's thought by its foundation upon Reason and proven principles, which he terms 'POSTULATES [...] from the science of mathematics'. However, while he has supposedly invoked sound mathematical principles as the basis of his thought, Coleridge states that 'philosophy is employed on objects of INNER SENSE'. Here he contradicts his earlier dismissal of the abstraction of 'transcendent' philosophy with the implication that 'transcendental' thought is likewise based upon intuition, because he does not explain how we know such intuition is correct. Coleridge reiterates the Delphic maxim, 'KNOW THYSELF' as 'the postulate of philosophy', to align himself with the ancient oracle. By this manoeuvre Coleridge overshadows the inconsistency of his argument with brilliant rhetoric and places his thought in the revered tradition of antiquity and its true philosophical inheritors.⁶⁸

A number of subjects discussed in this chapter converge in Coleridge's concept of the Imagination, a recurrent idea theorized formally in *Biographia Literaria*. First, it is evident that, much as Coleridge propounds the existence of a 'philosophic organ', the Imagination is the tragic organ. Raymond Williams claims that the reader or spectator's response to suffering defines the tragic in life and in art: 'Where the suffering is felt, where it is taken into the person of another, we are clearly within the possible dimensions of the tragic.' James Engell and W. Jackson Bate define the 'sympathetic imagination', as Coleridge portrays it in the *Biographia*, in terms strikingly close to those used by Williams to capture the essence of the tragic. 'Sympathetic imagination', the editors explain, is 'the capacity to enter into the feelings and experience of another, and submerge one's own identity in the process'.⁶⁹ An appeal to this faculty, Coleridge claims, is at the heart of Shakespeare's genius, which absorbs his reader or audience so greatly in pathos that 'you seem to be *told* nothing, but to see and hear everything'. Engell and Bate cite eighteenth-century theories of moral sympathy as sources for Coleridge's argument here, and suggest primarily the works of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759).⁷⁰ But Coleridge's

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 236–7, 237n, 247–8, 252.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. cix.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 21 and n.

description of experiencing Shakespeare in Chapter 15 has direct resemblance to the process of dramatic illusion, and to Greek tragedy ‘lulling’ the audience into ‘nobler thoughts’, which is different from the instinctive sympathies hypothesized by Hutcheson. While I argue elsewhere that Coleridge introduces traits of tragedy to the tradition of balladry, there is a parallel in his use of the theory of watching tragedy to enrich debate on moral sympathy.

Second, Coleridge explains that the Imagination ‘blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial’.⁷¹ It mediates between ideas and reality. For example, ideas of language and philosophy need corresponding reality; such is the foundation that Coleridge opines is necessary for the credible or ‘transcendental’ philosopher. Thus Coleridge’s model of the Imagination manifests his model of tragic conflict, of the ever-varying Balance [...] of Images, Notions, or Feelings [...] conceived as in opposition to each other’; onto both theories he transposes the scientific principle of polarity between two opposite powers in tension (just as Fichte and Schelling, Coleridge’s sources, do likewise). As a product of the Imagination, Coleridge argues that the function of art is to reconcile humanity to its experience in the external world. So Coleridge’s model of the Imagination yields a concise definition of his conception of tragedy as a mode that identifies processes and meaning in catastrophe. Thus Coleridge anticipates – or adheres to the school of thought that influences – René Girard’s conclusion that tragedy is an invitation to use reason to analyse the role of violence in society.⁷²

Third, in its position at the centre of a polarity of the ideal and the real, the Imagination offers an allegory for Coleridge’s own role as sage: Coleridge offers himself as an intermediary force, a hierophant of the mysterious to the reader. To accept the philosophical theory of the Imagination is not only to recognize Coleridge’s sagacity; it is implicitly to approve of the role of mediation that Coleridge assumes. In *Sibylline Leaves* Coleridge introduces an enigmatic, scholarly commentator who glosses the text of ‘The Ancient Mariner’. In antiquated diction, this fictitious annotator interprets the poem on the reader’s behalf in marginal notes. In *The Statesman’s Manual* Coleridge’s role is political as, on the reported invitation of publisher Rest Fenner, he offers a religious interpretation of history. Here he founds his Biblical authority on a challenge to the reader’s ‘notion that you are already acquainted with its contents.’⁷³

Aptly, R.J. White introduces *The Statesman’s Manual* by commenting that ‘the Ancient Mariner [...] had reached harbour’. He adds wryly of the troubled and melodramatic Coleridge that ‘a man has a way of becoming his mask’: the period of *The Statesman’s Manual* is not a new phase of thought for Coleridge, but rather a time at which he perfects the role of sage. In *The Statesman’s Manual* Coleridge finds means to express his ‘rigorous thought’ for financial profit; in *Biographia Literaria* he employs his grievances in a manner that benefits him with book sales

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷² *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 336.

⁷³ *Lay Sermons*, p. 25.

and offers instruction to the reader.⁷⁴ In a familiar pattern, Coleridge conveys the importance of his task in a letter to R.H. Brabant. He informs the recipient that his persistence in composition of *The Statesman's Manual* despite his poor constitution has rendered him 'so weak and low that I am obliged to narrate with broken conciseness':

I had been solicited by the House of Gale & Fenner [...] to give them a small Tract on the present Distresses in the form of a Lay-sermon [...]. I undertook it—money I was to have none—but as a mark of respect [...]. I labored from morning to night.⁷⁵

Due to the sudden cessation of conflict in Europe, the British economy, which had been heavily reliant on the war industry, experienced the 'Distresses' that prompted Fenner's suggestion of the *Lay Sermons*. Food shortages caused by inflationary prices were among the most acute consequences of the new peace. Ironically, Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual* is addressed to those least affected by the shortage, 'the higher classes of society'. A Lay Sermon for the 'Lower and Labouring Classes', although advertised by Fenner, was never composed by Coleridge. In *The Statesman's Manual* he assumes the role of advisor to the elite, whom he shames for their attention to 'the guesses of star-gazers' instead of his own 'permanent prophecies' and 'eternal truths'.⁷⁶

In practice, Coleridge's 'prophecies' reveal little and it is his attitude to social distinction that indicates the nature of his aspiration to Tiresian reverence. Despite his boasted promise to make 'permanent prophecies', Coleridge does no more in *The Statesman's Manual* than preach obscurity.⁷⁷ He quotes apocalyptic admonishments from Scripture that 'a wicked and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign' and warns his readers 'the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment of this generation and condemn it'.⁷⁸ Coleridge's claim that the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures are valid is founded upon the abstraction that they are 'symbols' which – even by Coleridge's particular definition of the symbolic as that which partakes of the divine rather than a mere representative of it – allows the Biblical prophecies to remain so imprecise as to foretell any conceivable event. He argues for a divine 'objective necessity' and offers a vague assurance that 'Reason hath faith in itself' and is self-proving or 'groundless'. Coleridge's philosophy in *The Statesman's Manual* is conservative: unlike the promise of amelioration in Coleridge's early visions of tragedy, he now urges contentment with one's lot. If this emphasis is likely to appeal to Coleridge's audience among the 'higher

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. xxix–xxx.

⁷⁵ *CL*, IV, p. 672.

⁷⁶ *Lay Sermons*, p. 7.

⁷⁷ There is dramatic irony in the extent of Coleridge's turnaround, as in 1796 he warns that 'implicit faith in mysteries prepares the mind for implicit obedience to tyranny.' *Watchman*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Matt. 12.39–41 (var.), quoted in *Lay Sermons*, pp. 10–11.

classes', he does not fear rebuttal from the lower orders. With a quotation that he does not identify, Coleridge implies that 'the labouring classes' need neither read *The Statesman's Manual* nor pay attention to its politico-economic background: 'They are not sought for in public counsel, nor need they be found where politic sentences are spoken.—It is enough if every one is wise in the working of his own craft: so best will they maintain the state of the world.' Conflating different passages, rewording but retaining the sense of the original text, Coleridge's source is Plato, reproduced in the same manner that he fuses different passages attributed to Heraclitus in a subsequent paragraph of *The Statesman's Manual*.⁷⁹ In the *Republic*, with justice defined as 'doing one's own work', Plato depicts Socrates reasoning in favour of class division and the exclusion of the masses from politics:

It seems, then that the power that consists in everyone's doing his own work rivals wisdom, moderation, and courage in its contribution to the virtue of the city [...]. Meddling and exchange between [the] three classes, then, is the greatest harm that can happen to the city and would rightly be called the worst thing someone could do to it.⁸⁰

While Coleridge's recourse in middle age to forms of Platonism and anti-democratic politics are well known, of further interest is his identification with Plato as author and their similar use of text to establish the character of sage, whereby each argues for his own prominence in civic life.

Both authors draw attention to the scarcity of true philosophers: Plato claims that 'the majority cannot be philosophic' and that most of those 'for whom philosophy is most appropriate, fall away from her, they leave her desolate and unwed'.⁸¹ The sentiment is recalled in Coleridge's dismissal of 'transcendent' thinkers and his claim that many people lack the 'philosophic organ'. Plato argues that 'those who are to be made our guardians [...] must be philosophers', and it becomes apparent that his ideal king is a self-portrait.⁸² In response to Plato, Karl Popper cites the 'unconscious little satire' of G.B. Stern's *The Ugly Dachshund* (1938), in which the Great Dane formulates the idea of a perfect dog, then realizes it is himself. To Popper, Plato makes an unabashed and explicit case in the *Republic* for his right to rule: 'If you want me, you must come to me, and if you insist, I may become your ruler.'⁸³

Coleridge has no ambition so high as sovereignty, and is likely to agree with Kant's response to Plato; that a king should allow philosophers free expression, but should not be one himself, 'since possession of power unavoidably corrupts

⁷⁹ *Lay Sermons*, pp. 29–32, 7, 20.

⁸⁰ *Republic*, trans. by G.M.A. Grube and rev. C.D.C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 971–1223 (pp. 1051–2, sections 433[d]–434[c]).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1116–17 (sections 494[a]–495[b]).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 1124 (section 503[b]).

⁸³ Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume I: The Spell of Plato* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2003; repr. 2007), pp. 165–6.

the free judgment of reason'.⁸⁴ However, in *The Statesman's Manual* Coleridge uses similar strategies to Plato to establish his own importance as sage, which is above that of politicians:

It would not be difficult, by an unbroken chain of historic facts, to demonstrate that the most important changes in the commercial relations in the world had their origin in the closets or lonely walks of uninterested theorists [...] Their results [...] had their origin [...] in the visions of recluse genius.⁸⁵

With this self-portrait, in a text that responds to the distresses that follow warfare, Coleridge signals his move from the position of Cassandra, the victim of tragic process, to that of Tiresias, the wise but detached commentator on it, who has overcome his hardships. Coleridge's attainment of his desired status – and the means by which he accomplishes it – is evidenced by Yeats's identification of the late Coleridge with 'Tireisias, [who] talked to the occasion'; Yeats perceives that it is a kind of performance that allows Coleridge to assume his place in respectable society.⁸⁶ Later, in *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829), Coleridge theorizes this position formally as 'clerisy', a privileged social-class of pedagogues. While the early Coleridge evokes in his 'Monody' the death of Socrates, documented by a young Plato, middle-aged Coleridge evokes the later Plato, and casts himself no longer as a victim consumed in tragic sacrifice but a state figure who comments on the 'objective necessity' of catastrophe, the sage.

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 338.

⁸⁵ *Lay Sermons*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ *Explorations*, p. 299.

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Chapter 7

Failed Sacrifices and the Un-Tragic Coleridge

I have argued for the tragic philosophy as an elected position that allows Coleridge to identify benefits that might arise from misfortune, to justify suffering within a greater context of redemption. The tragic vision facilitates Coleridge's acceptance of hardship as necessary in a rational and ordered universe. From this perspective he attempts to reconcile the portions of human experience that are miserable with his perception of a creator – or the universe at an essential level – as ultimately benign, if mysterious. My theory is not so tidy as this overview implies, primarily because Coleridge's tragic philosophy alters throughout his lifetime. The social vision of Coleridge's youth accords with the modern, democratized tragedy posited by Raymond Williams, while the older Coleridge's view of his world is more readily identifiable with the conservative tragedy delineated by René Girard. Also, Coleridge is preoccupied by the themes and machinations of tragedy, but almost never composes anything that might be termed a 'tragedy'. The nature of tragedy's fertile presence in Coleridge's thought is that it recurs in diverse guises, with little generic consistency.

In this chapter I consider a further complication. Coleridge's works are troubled by fears that the tragic philosophy might be mistaken, and hence that human suffering might serve no purpose. Such doubts undermine significantly Coleridge's conception of the human strife in revolution and warfare during his lifetime, which is futile if the tragic vision is erroneous. A failed sacrifice is merely an act of violence, an agent of destruction and misery. Furthermore, the failure of the tragic philosophy has severe implications for the author, who initiates kinds of sacrifice.

First I wish to address the subject of failed sacrifice in Coleridge's works, which can be viewed both in material and spiritual terms. Ideally in the tragic vision, strife as sacrifice brings about political and social reform. Religiously it is also an agent of spiritual salvation, under the assumption that endurance of hardship is beneficial. But later in life, Coleridge departs from a philosophy that human suffering can be an agent of redemption. He adopts instead a Christian belief that the Crucifixion is the only sacrifice that can bring widespread spiritual amelioration. Coleridge does not turn to orthodox Christianity until adopting Trinitarian belief in 1804, but as early as 1798 he expresses doubt in the tragic vision. He hoped that the violence of his age would improve society, but he is now uncertain that any tangible benefit will arise. The French Revolution is the major historical influence on Coleridge's anxiety that suffering might occur in vain. This is evident in his gradual doubt of whether the atrocities that result from the

insurrection are morally justifiable. Yet his scepticism followed a period of such belief in the processes of revolution that Coleridge tolerated its brutality. Although only rendered blank verse by Southey from newspaper transcripts, the conclusion of *The Fall of Robespierre* was read by Coleridge prior to publication of the play. I assume that Coleridge approved of Southey's treatment of events, as he did not alter his collaborator's text in this passage. In response to Lecointre's report of Robespierre's death, Barrere has the final words in the drama. He foretells that the Thermidorian violence will provoke the French to pursue universal liberty:

Though myriads round assail,
And with worse fury urge this new crusade
Than savages have known; though the leagued despots
Depopulate all Europe, so to pour
The accumulated mass upon our coasts,
Sublime amid the storm shall France arise,
And like the rock amid surrounding waves
Repel the rushing ocean.—She shall wield
The thunder-bolt of vengeance—she shall blast
The despot's pride, and liberate the world!
(*The Fall of Robespierre*, III.205–14)

This remarkable, proleptic justification of conflict contrasts starkly with Coleridge's private concerns about 'Bad means for a good end—I cannot conceive that <there can be> any road to Heaven through Hell.' Seamus Perry connects this notebook entry with two passages from Coleridge's 1795 lectures. First, as mentioned in a previous chapter, Perry cites Coleridge's observation that Robespierre 'possessed a glowing ardour that still remembered the end, and a cool ferocity that never either overlooked, or scrupled, the means.' Perry juxtaposes this comment with Coleridge's subsequent declaration that he must 'deny the existence of any Evil, inasmuch as the end determines the nature of the means and I have been able to discover nothing of which the end is not good.'¹

While I find that Perry makes apposite selections here, and identifies thematic parallels with the notebook entry, his point needs elucidation. Evidently, Coleridge feels that Robespierre can conceive a 'road to Heaven though Hell', and that Coleridge himself cannot do likewise indicates his lack of steadfast faith both in the Revolution and in the doctrine of Necessitarianism. Hence, introducing 'France: An Ode' three years later, Coleridge claims that he had perceived 'the blasphemies and horrors during the domination of the [Thermidorian] Terrorists' as 'a transient storm'. He defended the violence as necessary, cleansing acts – 'the natural consequence of the former despotism' – but stresses that these former opinions were mistaken (ll. 1.5–1.8). To Coleridge the French Revolution has not succeeded, despite the intentions of its supporters and the professed ideals of its leaders. Hence the revolutionary bloodshed has been in vain.

¹ Coleridge's *Notebooks: A Selection*, p. 138.

A Smack of Prometheus: The Peril of the Thinker

The failed sacrifice unsettles Coleridge not only in his interpretation of history, but because he risks this *hamartia* himself as philosopher and author. In a previous chapter I drew on Kenneth Burke's suggestion that the author's reduction of a thought or event to written narrative is necessarily a type of violence, which Burke terms 'sloughing off' or 'killing'. René Girard's central hypothesis is comparable, although the killing is real: 'the origin of symbolic thought lies in the mechanism of the surrogate victim.'² In the radical politics of his youth, which he later resigns, Coleridge endorses literal sacrifice to an extent by his support of revolutionary principles. However, Coleridge manifests sacrifice as an artistic practice throughout his career, and he becomes progressively fearful of its dangers. If Coleridge as sage is deluded about the origin of his visions, which may not be authoritative or inspired, the quest of symbolism might be considered an act of *hybris*, the wanton provocation of the gods. As symbolist Coleridge explains that he attempts to access divinity by 'seeking [...] a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists.' As he interprets and gives voice to the soul he presumes to speak for God. Nicholas Halmi is correct to perceive that Coleridge's 'earnest hope' here is accompanied by an 'uncertain apprehension'; that Coleridge intimates the danger of his own, questing symbolism.³ He risks a fall, akin to the Semitic or the Promethean, or that warned of by the chorus of Euripides' *Bacchae*: 'To be clever is not to be wise, and thoughts that go beyond mortal limits spell a short life. In view of this, who would pursue great ambitions rather than accept his present lot? These are the ways of madmen, in my verdict, whose wits have left them.'⁴

Paul A. Cantor suggests that such a view of intellectualism as a fallen condition was popularized in 1790s Britain by readings of *Paradise Lost*; yet, Cantor adds, humanity's mental faculties were thought to be included in God's redemptive plan.⁵ Cantor's observation is usefully applicable to Coleridge, although the complexity of the point requires disentanglement. Philosophy itself has the duality of the *pharmakos*. An agent and legacy of humanity's damnation, yet a possible means of salvation, the intellect reaches for communion with divinity. The possibility that this attempt might be an act of *hybris* only troubles the thinker who is not confident of the Christian scheme of redemption, or the beneficial role of intellectualism in that process. Aptly, Geoffrey Brereton comments that only the 'imperfect Christian' allows the concept of tragedy.⁶ A discussion of the

² *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 247.

³ Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, pp. 345–58 (p. 350).

⁴ Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, trans. by John Davie, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 137.

⁵ Paul A. Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 2.

⁶ *Principles of Tragedy*, p. 52.

specific nature of Coleridge's religious beliefs is not necessary for my argument, but to establish his uncertainty I indicate merely the diversity of denominations and philosophies he adopted at different times of his life, including Unitarianism, Pantheism and a Neo-Platonist interpretation of Christianity. With this observation I reject the idea that uncertainty is a necessary condition of the poet or philosopher of the Romantic period. For example, James Joyce's assessment of William Blake provides a contrast to Coleridge's inconstant religious and philosophical positions: 'The path of destiny was for him strangely straight and bright [...]. The English presumption of a God-illuminated judgment reached its acme of assurance.'⁷ Joyce's admiration for the assured Blake is in contrast with the tragic thinker Yeats, Joyce's contemporary and compatriot, who models himself on an uncertain Coleridge.

In several works Coleridge articulates the feared consequences of tragic processes that do not result in redemption. Some of these texts narrate the aftermath of failed physical sacrifices; acts which are merely violent because they produce no positive outcome. In other works he intimates that there are inherent spiritual dangers to the philosopher or artist. These two positions are comparable, in the manner that the 'killing' by Burke's writer resembles the rite of sacrifice in Girard's hypothesis. In 'The Wanderings of Cain' both positions are evident, as a killer and an artistic figure are depicted together. The characters experience the desolation of separation from God, and even persecution by him. Additionally, one of the characters has particular associations with authorship. Thus 'The Wanderings of Cain' provides not only supposed Biblical truths, but an allegory for the spiritual risks of creativity. Coleridge's piece, intended to continue from an opening canto that Wordsworth never composed, follows Cain's murder of Abel. As in the 'Ancient Mariner' after the death of the albatross, the numinous sun is obscured to indicate Cain's disgrace: 'the sun at high noon sometimes speckled, but never illumined [the path], and now it was dark as a cavern' (II.7). When Cain is touched by moonlight, he is burned. Coleridge connects physical acts of transgression to the idea of a visual language of the fallen: 'His countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and still were to continue to be'. With the character of Cain's son, named 'Enos' in the poem, Coleridge juxtaposes the matter of bodily sacrifice with philosophical or artistic ambition. As J.C.C. Mays explains, Coleridge uses the incorrect Biblical name, but thereby associates the author with a particular relation to God:

The eldest son of Cain was Enoch [...]. He is represented in tradition as the inventor of letters, arithmetic, and astronomy, and as the first author. Enos, on the other hand, was the son of Seth [...]; he is associated with the beginnings of prayer and, by the meaning of his name, with man in his frailty and weakness.⁸

⁷ Quoted in L.A.G. Strong, *The Sacred River: An Approach to James Joyce* (London: Methuen & Co., 1949), p. 86.

⁸ *PW*, I.1, p. 361n.

As Enos prays in vain, the wraith of Abel laments that his sacrifices to God have not availed him. Both physical and verbal appeals to God have been unproductive, and separation from the divine is so pronounced that the characters are uncertain who their God is (II.118–26). Hence, the inhospitable, masculine landscape appears not to have been formed by a god, but by human sorrow. Images evoked in descriptions of the scenery foretell human strife and ambition: ‘The pointed and shattered summits of the ridges of the rocks made a rude mimicry of human concerns, and seemed to prophesy mutely of things that then were not; steeples, and battlements, and ships with naked masts’ (II.68–71). The artistic Enos, the murderer Cain and the victim Abel share a penumbral existence in which the innocent share the fate of wrongdoers. Human endeavour is futile, if not an affront to the gods.

The severance of a desired communion with God recurs as the theme of ‘Limbo’ (1811). Morton D. Paley’s study is useful to establish the importance of wit in a group of poems that usually generates very sombre scholarly responses (such as Jerome McGann’s, of which more subsequently).⁹ However, I think that Paley places too much emphasis on puns, which he alludes to throughout the poetic sequence, and plays down the poems’ seriousness too greatly. I think that a useful interpretation of the sequence arises from juxtaposition of Paley’s light reading of the poems with the more solemn. The poems proceed from reflection on wit to anxious and imaginative speculation on the consequences of misdirected creative energies.

‘Limbo’ is occasioned by John Donne’s ‘The Flea’ and a consideration of the nature of creativity.¹⁰ The idea of authorship leads Coleridge to contemplate the risk of separation from God. Limbo is a pain of absences, ‘the mere Horror of blank Naught at all’ (‘Limbo’ ll. 23). It is a place of disempowerment and alienation, of ‘Half-being’ and ‘scytheless Time’ (4–5). George Steiner considers such a position the extreme gradation of tragedy. In a more recent work Steiner relaxes the exclusivity with which he defined the mode in *The Death of Tragedy*. He depicts different degrees and conditions of the tragic, amongst which is ‘absolute tragedy’, a ‘negative ontology’ in which God, and hope, are absent.¹¹ To Jean-Paul Sartre, philosophy occurs necessarily in a comparable nothingness that is separate from being. Such a godless perspective is unacceptable to Coleridge as a theological thinker, but nonetheless I wish to draw on Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) in relation to the ‘Limbo’ sequence. Sartre’s study of humanity’s fear of its own potentiality – exemplified by the vertigo of the cliff-walker – parallels Coleridge’s anxiety that philosophy might lead to destruction or desolation: ‘I approach the precipice, and my scrutiny is searching for myself in my very depths. In terms of

⁹ Morton D. Paley, *Coleridge’s Later Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 41–61.

¹⁰ CN, III, § 4073.

¹¹ George Steiner, ‘A Note on Absolute Tragedy’, *Literature and Theology*, 4:2 (1990), 147–56 (p. 147).

this moment, I play with my possibilities. My eyes, running over the abyss from top to bottom, imitate the possible fall and realize it symbolically.¹²

In the course of writing 'Limbo', Coleridge arrives at contemplation of a worse spiritual state, 'A fear, a future fate. Tis *positive Negation!*' (28). What Steiner terms a 'negative ontology' is described in the next poem in the sequence, 'Ne Plus Ultra', as the 'Opposite of God', a 'Condensed Blackness, and Abysmal Storm' ('Ne Plus Ultra', ll. 4–5). Coleridge's terror is not solely that he might be reduced to this condition, but the possibility that he might lead himself to it in his work, akin to the tragic protagonist who hastens unwittingly to his fate. Jerome J. McGann writes of this sequence of poems that 'the feelings of desperation and bewilderment that emerge with these sorts of ideological losses and surrenders are powerful and terribly moving precisely because their vehicular form is a poetic one.'¹³ Unlike McGann, I find that the losses Coleridge contemplates are irretrievable. The threat of damnation is brought nearer by the 'vehicular' effort of poetry.

Coleridge's readings of tragedy in his critical lectures are frequently concerned with *anagnoresis*, the moment at which a protagonist recognizes his/her situation and in which the threat of destruction is imminent. In particular Coleridge takes interest in the protagonist's psychological state when *anagnoresis* occurs. The most famous of Coleridge's critical studies is his analysis of the interiority of Hamlet, first articulated in a lecture of 1812 and reiterated in subsequent lecture courses. Coleridge refutes popular claims that Hamlet's character is poorly developed with the observation that inconsistency of thought is a mark of realism. To Coleridge the fundamental struggle of the play is not the conflict of Hamlet and his usurper uncle, but that in the mind between 'impressions from outward objects' and the 'inward operation of the intellect': a tragic polarity internalized.¹⁴ When Coleridge chooses a favourite speech in drama it is Hamlet's resolution to obey the ghost. Hamlet identifies a course of vengeance that might restore order to Denmark, but he risks death and courts madness with alliance to a spectre that he is not certain is genuine:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen & Co., 1958; repr. Routledge Classics, 2007), p. 56.

¹³ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 98.

¹⁴ *LoL*, I, p. 539.

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there;
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmixed with baser matter: yes, yes, by heaven!
 O most pernicious woman!
 O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain!
 My tables,
 My tables: meet it is I set it down
 That one may smile and smile and be a villain;
 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark.
 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word:
 It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.'
 I have sworn't.
 (*Hamlet*, I.v.97–118)

Coleridge comments that 'I remember nothing equal to this burst unless it be the first speech of Prometheus, after the exit of Vulcan & the two Afrites, in Eschylus.'¹⁵ Prometheus' speech, like Hamlet's above, adopts psychological foci:

See with what outrage
 Racked and tortured I am to agonize
 For a thousand years!
 [...]
 I groan in anguish
 For pain present and pain to come:
 Where shall I see rise
 The star of my deliverance?

What am I saying? I know every thing
 That is to be; no torment will come unforeseen.¹⁶

As exemplary passages of tragedy, Coleridge chooses speeches in which characters apprehend their crises. I think he does so because he identifies with them; he senses that their plight parallels his own sensation of spiritual imperilment as he articulates it in 'The Wanderings of Cain', 'Limbo' and 'Ne Plus Ultra'. This comparison is facilitated by the readiness with which Prometheus and Hamlet are identifiable as philosophical or artistic figures. The self-imposed torment of philosophy might lead Coleridge to declare that he had 'a smack of Prometheus' to him.

Unnerved by the spiritual risks of his own mental activity, Coleridge curbs the reach of his philosophy. Partially, this inclination is evident in relatively

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 299.

¹⁶ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound, The Suppliants, Seven Against Thebes, The Persians*, trans. by Philip Vellacott (London: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 23–4.

early works. Patricia S. Yaeger cites 'The Eolian Harp' as an example of Coleridge's 'tendency to abandon an interesting or thought-provoking style for a pre-determined formula.' She refers to Coleridge's introduction of his pious wife, whose displeasure ends Coleridge's visionary ascent. Yaeger detects in Coleridge's notebooks generally 'a fear of the pen's ability to derange theological order.'¹⁷ The pattern of aspiration curtailed by caution becomes more pronounced in Coleridge's thought, and gradually impedes his intellectual activity.

In a prose fragment similar thematically to 'Limbo' (dated 1820 or later by H.J. Jackson), Coleridge writes of a fearful 'shadow, that subsists in shaped and definite Non-entity'. Presumably as a means to avoid such a fate, he recommends 'the expediency even in a moral sense of not carrying metaphysical speculation above a certain height uninterruptedly; but then to descend to the practical uses, of which it may be capable.'¹⁸ Paul Hamilton laments such self-restriction and infers that Coleridge's 'ubiquitous religious commitment to Christian doctrine inhibits his full participation in scientific and philosophical debate.'¹⁹ Hamilton's claim is substantiated, for example, by the experience of intellectual freedom delineated in *Opus Maximum*, where it is bound by condition: 'the Will has to struggle upward into FREE-WILL—but observe that Freedom which is impossible except as it becomes one with the Will of God.'²⁰ Furthermore, Hamilton's use of the word 'ubiquitous' coincides with my sense that Coleridge's 'religious commitment' is frequently demonstrative, and that primarily he attempts to reassure himself. The shackled interpretation of free will in *Opus Maximum* is at odds with the shapeless metaphysics of the work, and I infer that Coleridge appeals to Christianity to keep his 'abstruse research' in check. Given this limitation, it is apt that Coleridge names Sophocles his favourite Greek tragedian of his later years, while he describes him elsewhere as 'the mildest' of the ancient Greek dramatists: 'In Æschylus religion appears terrible, malignant and persecuting: Sophocles is the mildest of the three tragedians, but the persecuting aspect is still maintained: Euripides is like a modern Frenchman, never so happy as when giving a slap at the gods altogether.'²¹

Coleridge's eventual solution to the philosophical problem he detects in tragedy is similar to the 'disengagement' that David Erdman identifies in his later attitude to the French Revolution.²² Erdman interprets Wordsworth and Coleridge's move to Germany in 1798, an area outside the war zone, as a signal of the authors' wish to dissociate themselves from the consequences of the Revolution, to cease interaction with the subject entirely rather than express approval or disapprobation.

¹⁷ Patricia S. Yaeger, 'Coleridge, Derrida and the Anguish of Writing', *Substance*, 12:2 (1983), 89–102 (pp. 93, 96).

¹⁸ *SWF*, II, p. 865 and n.

¹⁹ Paul Hamilton, 'The Philosopher', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, pp. 170–86 (p. 171).

²⁰ *OM*, p. 144.

²¹ *TT*, I, pp. 401, 24.

²² *EoT*, I, p. lx.

Similarly, although two decades after the decisive disengagement from the French Revolution, tragedy's philosophical presence becomes absent from Coleridge's works following his last series of literary lectures in 1818. It is as if Coleridge has progressed gradually from the specific example of the failed Revolution to realize that all such conflict is useless, and he shuns tragedy for its glorification of struggle. Coleridge has ceased to argue that violence can be justified politically, and now finds also that the severity of tragedy cannot be validated theologically. This different perspective, or evasion of a problematic theme, shapes Coleridge's later poetical and critical works.

In 'Alice du Clós, or, the Forked Tongue: A Ballad' (1828?), by contrast with the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel', tragic devices and philosophy of life are entirely absent. The sole significant action of the poem occurs when Sir Julian shoots his betrothed Alice fatally, but this is narrated only tersely in a conclusive stanza. Coleridge lacked motivation to proceed with the poem as he originally conceived it as early as 1801. In correspondence of 1829 Coleridge makes a weak excuse for his reluctance to explore the death of Alice and his failure to continue the work in the manner of his most famous poems: 'It was my original intention to have annexed as a sort of Post-script Super-conclusion from six to eight stanzas in the legendary, supernatural, imaginative style of popular superstition. But in the first place, the Tale or Lyrical Ballad is already lengthier, as Brother Jonathan says, than you wish.' Subsequently Coleridge admits that he has neither the inclination nor the ability to develop 'Alice du Clós' as he might once have done:

I had from the first planning of the Ballad conceived & intended what struck me as a highly lyrical & impressive conclusion—intimating the fate & punishment of Julian & the Traitor—and tho' every thought & image is present to my mind, I have not, in the existing state of my feelings, the power of bringing them forth in the requisite force & fire of diction & metre.²³

In the 'Ancient Mariner' the poem's tragic interest follows a shooting – the deaths of the sailors, the suffering of the Mariner and the enlightenment his auditor gains from the narrative – but it is at the same moment of catastrophe that Coleridge abandons 'Alice du Clós'. Hence the ballad is contained by the same kind of wariness that disappoints Hamilton in his evaluation of Coleridge's later philosophy. Where Coleridge claims in his letter that he lacks the 'power' to continue towards the 'impressive conclusion', I suspect that he lacks the desire to do so.

In a poem from the final year of Coleridge's life, he documents a shift in one of his recurrent principles, centred on a maxim that is at the heart of Greek tragedy. In 'E Cælo Descendit, ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΤΟΝ!' (1834), Coleridge returns to the Delphic maxim, 'know thyself'. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge provides a concise formulation of how the saw is applied in his thought: 'Know thyself: and so shalt thou know God, as far as is permitted to a creature, and in God all things.'²⁴ In the

²³ *CL*, VI, pp. 800, 804.

²⁴ *BL*, II, p. 240n.

late poem the adage prompts Coleridge to pose a new question, which reveals his doubt that introspection has beneficial ends: ‘What hast thou, Man, that can be known?’ (‘E Caelo Descendit’, l. 6). The rejection of self-knowledge is explicit at the poem’s conclusion:

Vain sister of the worm,—life, death, soul, clod—
Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God! (9–10)

Primarily, ‘E Caelo Descendit’ seems a simplistic, didactic work in which Coleridge discourages narcissism, and prioritizes the theologian’s knowledge of God rather than the self. However, the admonition against self-knowledge, invoking Delphi explicitly, is also Coleridge’s response to a recurrent theme in Sophocles’ tragedy. In *Antigone* crisis arises from dualities of identity: the discord of public and private personae, and the conflict between religious and civic duties. In holy piety, and as a sister, Antigone must bury Polyneices, but in obedience to her ruler she must respect the decree of the state to leave his body to rot. Creon’s punishment of Antigone continues the themes of muddled identity and blasphemy, as he leaves the dead unburied while he entombs the living. In Sophocles’ later drama *King Oedipus* the eponym’s name puns on *oida*, ‘I know’. Oedipus does not truly know whom he is, and is implored never to find out by his mother and wife. Oedipus’ and Laius’ visits to Delphi impel the events of the play. Oedipus’ obsession with identity is revealed as folly: each successive revelation increases his misery. Initially Oedipus wishes to find the polluter who brings plague and famine. Next he seeks to identify the man he slew at the *triados*, who transpires to be his own father. Finally, clarification that the messenger is same shepherd who rescued him as a child confirms the complex and horrific truth of Oedipus’ own identity: Oedipus is his father’s killer, his mother’s husband, his children’s brother, his city’s curse. As these revelations unfold Oedipus dishonours the gods and ignores their prophet, Tiresias. To Coleridge, pursuit of self-knowledge to the detriment of religious duty is likewise folly, but the elder Coleridge does not believe in the gods and fates that govern Sophocles’ world. Coleridge is not interested now in analysis of the catastrophes that result from such crises, but instead believes that these tragic situations can and should be avoided. This position is more fully illustrated by the last documented of Coleridge’s sustained discussions of Greek tragedy.

Prometheus Lost

It is with an extended meditation on a Greek tragedy that Coleridge confirms his later unease with the tradition. While Coleridge has formerly sought redemptive solace in misfortune, now he signals retreat from the mode and reluctance to engage philosophically with tragic situations. Coleridge delivered his lecture ‘On the Prometheus of Æschylus’ at the Royal Society of Literature in 1825, although most of the content seems to have originated in 1820. Roughly contemporary texts by several other authors are useful to assess Coleridge’s treatment of the subject. First, Hartley Coleridge’s fragmentary poem inspired by *Prometheus*

Bound, commenced in 1820 but published posthumously, I consider likely to have occasioned his father's revived interest in the play, based on family correspondence. Second, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; primarily the author's own work (rather than an adaptation or a translation), although his play on Aeschylus' title indicates a wish to revisit and revise the ancient text, and to conjecture how the lost portion of the trilogy concluded. Furthermore, in Act I Earth summons spirit-doubles to re-enact passages from Aeschylus' play, ostensibly to retract Prometheus' curse on Zeus by reiterating it. This device also allows Shelley to comment on a major influence on his drama by interpretation and alteration. Third, Keats's two poems on Hyperion (1820), while written without direct knowledge of Aeschylus' play, treat the same cycle in Graeco-Roman myth as *Prometheus Bound* does. The background of all these texts is the fall of the Titans and the ascent of the Olympians. In 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream' further interest arises from Keats's inclusion of the figure of the poet writing of such material.

Initially, Coleridge's lecture on Aeschylus has scant relevance to his advertised topic of discourse, even disregarding the preliminary remarks on the interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphics. The reflections on chaos and matter, if typically Coleridgean, seem to contribute nothing to our comprehension of the drama. Coleridge's reduction of *Prometheus Bound* to a fundamental opposition of Law and Idea is a questionable treatment of the text he purports to discuss. Such manoeuvres are only logical in consideration of Coleridge's comment that the 'mythic import' of Aeschylus' play is 'more properly tragedy itself in the plenitude of the idea, than a particular tragic poem.'²⁵ This apparently throwaway remark provides the means to understand Coleridge's lecture and, I think, his motives. Troubled by Aeschylus' play, Coleridge reaches beyond the confines of the text to accommodate and justify Aeschylus' work in his own philosophy. While its benefit to the auditors of the Royal Society of Literature is doubtful if they were expecting a cogent commentary on Aeschylus' drama, the lecture is of worth to scholars because it plays out the anxieties that tragedy evokes in Coleridge, and for its merit as an intellectual performance.

Aeschylus is an attractive figure; a general at the battle of Marathon, an initiate in the Eleusinian Mysteries said by Aristotle to have been tried for revealing the cult's practices onstage, and overall a man about whom sufficiently few facts are known to allow a quantity of fanciful legends to have arisen. Coleridge exploits the vagueness surrounding Aeschylus by presenting his own metaphysical philosophy as Aeschylean. By portraying a philosophical background to *Prometheus Bound*, Coleridge identifies it with the Semitic tradition and by association Christianizes the work. At first he relates the Greek tragic and the Semitic in simple terms of influence. Although the Phoenicians corrupted the knowledge of the Hebrews, Coleridge claims that 'secret schools of physiological theory' resisted 'polytheism' in Greece. Hence Athenian 'ethical tragedy and philosophy' arose at a time of subtle regulation by 'internal theocracy' and originate in 'the religious and lyrical poetry

²⁵ SWF, II, p. 1264.

of the Hebrews'. Coleridge implies that the ethics and religious practices that inform tragedy are indebted to the same Judaic practices that underlie Christianity. Better still, the shadowy 'internal theocracy' of the Eleusinian Mysteries allows Coleridge the possibility of a monotheistic Aeschylus, despite his context of polytheistic belief.²⁶

Next, Coleridge suggests that Aeschylus shares Heraclitus' fascination with understanding as a process. Thus Coleridge prepares his auditors for a digression on atomistic philosophy: he indicates that Heraclitus' theory of the development of matter parallels the evolution of the mind that Aeschylus depicts in *Prometheus Bound*.²⁷ The metaphor that connects Heraclitan philosophy to Aeschylean tragedy here is the likeness of the unenlightened mind to the chaos Heraclitus discusses. The primitive intellect lacks powers of organization, and its apprehension of sensory information is 'purposeless'. In the play Prometheus describes the transformation effected by his gift of fire:

In those days they had eyes, but sight was meaningless;
Heard sounds, but could not listen; all their length of life
They passed like shapes in dreams, confused and purposeless.
[...]
I taught them to determine when stars rise or set –
A difficult art. Number, the primary science, I
Invented for them, and how to set down words in writing –
The all-remembering skill, mother of many arts.²⁸

Coleridge identifies the origin of humanity's mental prowess as depicted in *Prometheus Bound* with the act of creation in the Book of Genesis – a sudden illumination of darkness – and the 'sublime mythus' of Adam's enlightenment by illicit knowledge in Eden.²⁹

While the commonality Coleridge adumbrates between *Prometheus Bound* and Genesis is reasonable, it is by no means the only possible reading of the play and its mythological background. Uses of the myth among Romantic contemporaries, juxtaposed with Coleridge's lecture, illuminate his tendency to emphasize and omit aspects of his source material to suit his purposes. For example, in Keats's 'Hyperion: A Fragment', the fallen Saturn (Cronus) considers finding a new chaos from which to form another universe that might overthrow the current one:

'But cannot I Create?
Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth
Another world, another universe,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1265.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1266.

²⁸ Vellacott trans., p. 34.

²⁹ *SWF*, II, p. 1266. In notes Coleridge distinguishes *Prometheus Bound* as 'a philosopheme' from 'the Tree of Knowledge' as 'Allegory'. *Ibid.*, p. 1288.

To overbear and crumble this nought?
Where is another Chaos?
(‘Hyperion: A Fragment’, ll. I.141–5)

In this mythic cycle Coleridge finds metaphysics that corroborate his Christian theology, but Keats suggests that the origin of the world from chaos in Graeco-Roman literature, in the hands of capricious gods, is not necessarily the same unique, unrepeatable act that occurs in Genesis.

When Shelley assesses the atomistic philosophy behind the Promethean myth, his version is yet further from Coleridge’s than Keats’s. Shelley presents a world that can be credibly explained only by godless science. In *Prometheus Unbound*, in a sequence entirely of Shelley’s own invention, Asia interrogates Demogorgon on the origin of the universe. To answer her questions Demogorgon attributes creation to ‘God’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.9–28). Yet Demogorgon, buried deep beneath the earth, is emphatically isolated and outmoded. Panthea has warned that Demogorgon’s utterances are ‘oracular vapour’. Shelley recalls the lonely, poetic figure of Coleridge’s ‘The Nightingale’, perhaps consciously as an act of derision, as Panthea explains that it is such prophecy ‘which lonely men drink wandering in their youth | And call truth, virtue, love, genius or joy’ (II. iii.5–6). Given this echo of Coleridge it is appropriate that Kelvin Everest believes that in these lines Shelley ‘hints at a connection between personal failure and a visionary political commitment’.³⁰ Hence Shelley may have detected a lesson in the apparent quickness with which Coleridge relinquished radicalism, as expressed in the climax of *Prometheus Unbound*. Asia’s success arises from her rejection of the mystical appeal of the oracular, to which Coleridge has been susceptible. More broadly Shelley’s radicalism is manifested in his development of Aeschylean source material to make atheistic statements about theism, in contrast with the hesitance that underlies Coleridge’s lecture.

In Shelley’s drama, love is revealed as the generative force of the universe and the eventual agent of Prometheus’ liberation. Stuart Curran reads Asia’s dialogue with Demogorgon as ‘self-communion’, since only information that Asia already knows is articulated.³¹ To complement Curran, Terence Hoagwood deduces that the travel to the subterranean lair of Demogorgon is mental; ‘thus Demogorgon [...is] located within the human mind’.³² Reasoning with the self replaces supplication to a god. Shelley implies that love is the nearest power to a god that can exist, while the worship of deities causes only strife. Creation itself cannot be explained by religion within this system. Furthermore, to Shelley philosophy does not carry

³⁰ Kelvin Everest, “‘Mechanism of a Kind Yet Unattempted’: The Dramatic Action of *Prometheus Unbound*”, in *Coleridge, Keats and Shelley*, ed. by Peter J. Kitson, New Casebooks (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), pp. 186–201 (p. 193).

³¹ Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 100.

³² Terence Hoagwood, *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind: Traditions of Blake and Shelley* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985), p. 168.

the risks that Coleridge associates with Adam's enlightenment. Accordingly, when Shelley's two fauns discuss the will-o'-the-wisp, the phenomenon is explained by reference to the nitrogen cycle rather than the supernatural:

The bubbles which the enchantment of the sun
Sucks from the pale faint water-flowers that pave
The oozy bottom of clear lakes and pools
Are the pavilions where such dwell and float
[...]
And when these burst, and the thin fiery air,
The which they breathed within those lucent domes,
Ascends to flow like meteors through the night,
They ride on them. (II.ii.71–80)

Shelley detects a resemblance to the psychological struggle of Prometheus in modern chemistry. The atheist Shelley misreads Aeschylus as much as the Christian Coleridge does, but the contrast demonstrates what divergent readings are possible, and how far Coleridge departs from the play.

Comparably to Hegel's model of *Antigone* as a conflict between the heroine and Creon, Coleridge reduces Aeschylus' play to a fundamental opposition or polarity. The tension between the two poles instigates the action of the play. Coleridge's opposites are 'Idea and Law, as correlatives that mutually interpret each other': 'An idea, with the adequate power of realizing itself, being a law, and a law considered abstractly from, or in the absence of, the power of manifesting itself in its appropriate product, being an idea.' Coleridge acknowledges that Aristotle would dispute such a representation of Idea, but claims that Plato's thought supports his argument: 'According to Aristotle, ideas are regulative only, and exist only as functions of the mind; according to Plato, they are constitutive likewise, and one in essence with the power and life of nature.' His summary of Plato reminds Coleridge of John 1.4, from which he quotes with slight alteration: 'in the word was life, and the life was the light of men'. Coleridge intimates thus that Aeschylus possesses some intrinsic commonality with Christianity, and argues further that 'mythic poets [...], like Aeschylus, adapted the secret doctrines of the mysteries as the (not always safely disguised) antidote to the debasing influences of the religion of the state.'³³ Thus Coleridge establishes Aeschylus as a logocentric philosopher who sought to counter-act the blasphemy of his time: a Coleridgean figure. This provides Coleridge with the foundation on which to build an account of *Prometheus Bound* that reflects the socio-political thought of his own middle age.

In an old essay that is one of few commentaries on the Prometheus lecture, James Holly Hanford writes of Coleridge's distraction by incorrect speculations linking Egyptian inscriptions to the Greek mysteries. Hanford observes that these influences on Coleridge's argument were widely abandoned as theoretical:

³³ *SWF*, II, pp. 1276–7.

Both Creuzer and Schelling had recognized the fact that their researches tended to confirm the older idea of the Hebraic origin of Greek mythology, but they had done so tentatively and with the warning that God had left no people without a witness of the truth. The religious and conservative-minded Coleridge followed the *ignis fatuus* which they had shunned, and the light which was in him became darkness.³⁴

A crucial point of Anthony J. Harding's newer study *The Reception of Myth in British Romanticism* is a warning against the confusion of the different entities of myth and tragedy. A tragedy can enact a myth, but only one of its versions. As he reaches beyond *Prometheus Bound* to mythic and theological analogues, Coleridge introduces material that the author may have not intended his audience to associate with his play. The disservice Coleridge does Aeschylus' drama arises from his presentation of the material on uncertain philosophical grounds rather than comments on the tragedy. The connections Coleridge identifies between Hebraic thought, Heraclitus and Aeschylus have flimsy predicates, but he is motivated by a theological need to reconcile these traditions.

H.J. Jackson suggests that the originality of Coleridge's interpretation of *Prometheus Bound* lies in his identification of the concepts represented by the opposing forces of Zeus and Prometheus.³⁵ This antagonism functions at two representative levels, respectively law (*nomos*) against idea, and thesis against antithesis. Coleridge uses a Kantian distinction between regulative and constitutive ideas that enriches the philosophical argument and is true to the play, which does not present Zeus and Prometheus as diametric opposites. Coleridge observes therefore that law is a body of regulative ideas, and also that the abstract application of the word 'ideas' relates to ideas that might be termed 'constitutive'. Hence a law is an idea to an extent, while ideas can only be made tangible by the law-like, ordering power of the Imagination and the constraints of linguistic expression. This is what Coleridge means when he says that law and idea 'mutually interpret each other'. Coleridge's allegory demonstrates his sensitivity to the commonalities of Zeus and Prometheus (unlike Shelley, for example, whose version simplifies the characters as diametric opposites). Coleridge's construal of law and idea is borne out by Aeschylus' play; Zeus is law as ruler, but Prometheus has power over Zeus because of his foreknowledge. Thus while law controls idea, law emerges from idea and remains subject to it.

Despite his perception of the subtleties of Zeus and Prometheus' opposition, Coleridge makes no prolonged interpretation of Aeschylus' play. Instead he abstracts elements of *Prometheus Bound* and absorbs them into a theory of how law and idea interact. Coleridge evokes a complaint commonly made of Freud's Oedipus complex; that Sophocles' *King Oedipus* serves Freud's theory, but that Freud's

³⁴ James Holly Hanford, 'Coleridge as Philologist', *Modern Philology*, 16:12 (1919), 615–36 (pp. 622–3).

³⁵ *SWF*, II, p. 1258.

theory does not serve the play.³⁶ Coleridge never mentions the agony of Prometheus, the widespread misery inflicted by Zeus, humanity's fear for its survival or how these aspects – the play's tragic essence – complicate his scheme of interaction between law and idea. Although Coleridge has formerly cited Prometheus' opening monologue as his favourite passage in drama, now he ignores the play's pathos. His implication that the powers represented by Zeus and Prometheus 'mutually interpret each other' strips Aeschylus' play of its force; Coleridge imposes an almost casual air upon their conflict with the laxity of his language. He does not mention how any of these ideas unfolds through dialogue and character interaction. While Coleridge addresses a 'Literary' society, he casts aside drama to make a strictly philosophical argument. I infer that he does not wish to talk about tragedy at all.

Coleridge's approach to Aeschylus indicates how he resolves one of his own philosophical quandaries: he acknowledges that 'the *Nous* is bound to a rock' by law. This limits artistic reach, but therefore it contains the risk to the author who, like Prometheus the 'inquisitor', is kept in check by greater authorities and is unable to exceed his province to work further harm.³⁷ Coleridge obviates the threat posed in Keats's 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream', in which the poet figure enters a mystery cult of Saturn to experience a vision of the Olympian revolt. He is warned that the misdirected creative-mind breaches order and invites death: 'If thou canst not ascend | These steps, die on that marble where thou art' ('The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream', ll. 107–8). The Kantian restriction of the domain of *Nous* can thus be seen as a religious requirement, or evidence of intellectual timidity, or both. With this comprehension it is evident that Coleridge's eventual retirement as a sage is paralleled by a theoretical retreat that offers him philosophical protection. The differences between his late and earlier poetry, like those in his philosophy, cannot be said solely to indicate creative powers in decline, but they result from conscious decisions on spiritual matters that were grave to Coleridge.

Hartley Coleridge's 'Prometheus: A Fragment' manifests the influence of his father's thoughts on *Prometheus Bound*. Hartley announces plans for the work in a letter of 1820. He indicates his debt to Coleridge's interpretation as he promises that his poem 'will serve as a sort of text, for some observations on the sacerdotal religion of Greece, and on the sources and spirit of mythology.'³⁸ Coleridge gratifies his son's keenness with a vast quantity of notes on the subject:

H. has the noblest Subject that perhaps a Poet has ever worked on—the Prometheus—and I have written a small volume almost to him, containing all the materials and comments on the full import of this most pregnant and sublime Mythos and Philosopheme—in short, the sum of all my Reading & reflection on this vast Wheel of the Mythology of the earliest Heathenism.³⁹

³⁶ For example, Mark Robson, 'Oedipal Visuality: Freud, Romanticism, *Hamlet*', *Romanticism*, 15:1 (2009), 54–64 (p. 55).

³⁷ *SWF*, II, p. 1282.

³⁸ *The Collected Letters of Hartley Coleridge*, ed. by Grace Evelyn Griggs and Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 29.

³⁹ *CL*, V, pp. 142–3.

Like his father, Hartley Coleridge avoids the tragic essence of Aeschylus' play and focuses elsewhere. Like Shelley, Hartley invents new material to accomplish his purpose rather than relying solely on passages he has found in Aeschylus. The world that Hartley Coleridge depicts is a solipsistic one, whose occupants are incapable of tragic sympathy. The Chorus of Sylphs is more concerned with Spenserian or Keatsian bowers of delight – the 'ambrosial fields of flowers' – than the war in heaven ('Prometheus: A Fragment', l. 17). Remarkably, the Sylphs' reason for attendance upon Prometheus is that he has disturbed their idyll, rather than compassion for his agony:

The deep, earthly groan
Of anguish half-stifled;
The ear-piercing shriek
Of pain in all its sharpness,—
A concert, all tuneless, came ruffling the rose-buds,
Where sweetly we slumber'd the sultry hours. (ll. 89–94)

Indeed, the Sylphs' first response to Prometheus is inhuman revulsion: 'Oh! Do not look at it | Or we shall grow like it' (47–8). While the events that have led to Prometheus' captivity are not clarified, the work is pervaded by a feeling of sadness, in the indulgent form of melancholy rather than tragic pathos: six references to weeping are made in the course of 18 lines (128–46).

The allusions to weeping in Hartley Coleridge's piece are Prometheus'. The character differs vastly from Aeschylus' protagonist, and over the course of the work the likeness that emerges instead is to the author's father, Coleridge himself. In a departure from Aeschylus' play, Prometheus condemns the Olympian revolt outright as 'treason, impious foul, unnatural' (507). Hartley does not allude to the fact that, in all mythological source material, Prometheus has assisted Zeus in the war against the Titans. This is much in accordance with Coleridge's various retractions and denials of his youthful support for the French Revolution. Accordingly, the Sylphs bemoan the fall of 'Jove, the Great God of Liberty' to 'tyranny', and even lament the end of the *ancien régime* of Titans (412–13, 366, 509–18). But Prometheus reminds the Sylphs that the Titans were likewise tyrannous:

Ay, they are gone; and he that holds their place
Is like them, strong and blind.
What wonder, then,
Though he fall mightily? (519–21)

Hartley's weary, embattled Prometheus, like Coleridge, realizes that revolution can provide no solution. Both choose disengagement as an alternative; they allow historical forces to play themselves out. The self-absorbed sylphs evoke a real-world populace incapable of Coleridge senior's tragic philosophy. Hence Hartley's Prometheus does not defy Zeus, but accepts his fate: 'the strife is past [...]. Now we

are agreed, | I and my destinies' (155, 168–9). Hartley's Coleridgean Prometheus lacks the resolve of Aeschylus' protagonist. He is consumed by regret and self-pity that are absent from the ancient drama:

I shall become a common tale,
A ruin'd fragment of a worn-out world;
Unchanging record of unceasing change,
Eternal landmark to the tide of time.
Swift generations, that forget each other,
Shall keep up the memory of my shame
Till I am grown an unbeliev'd fable. (275–81)

Hartley seems forgetful that Aeschylus' Prometheus, whose name means 'foreknowledge', is certain of his eventual emancipation. By contrast, the only consolation for Hartley's Prometheus is the benefit of his physical destruction, which is a version of the Crucifixion:

Cast this husk,
This hated, mangled, and dishonour'd carcase
Into the balance; so I have redeem'd
My power, birthright, even the changeless mind,
The imperishable essence uncontrol'd. (176–80)

Hartley Coleridge's final vision, like Shelley's, is one of love, but unlike Shelley, Hartley is unable to mediate catastrophe. To elide the conflict of *Prometheus Bound* abruptly he appends a hymnal conclusion in which prayer and silent patience are rewarded, and thus he avoids the tragic conflict at the core of Aeschylus' play:

Ye patient fields, rejoice!
The blessing that ye pray for silently
Is come at last; for ye shall no more fade,
[...]
The reign is past of ancient violence;
And Jove hath sworn that time shall not deface,
Nor death destroy, nor mutability
Perplex the truth of love. (563–622)

Hartley Coleridge, like his father in later years, turns from the tragic in the hope that redemption does not necessitate individual suffering.

Conclusion: ‘The sage, the poet, lives for all mankind’

In 1835, the year after her father’s death, Sara Coleridge wrote a diary entry on Thomas Noon Talfourd’s new play *Ion*, a florid drama set in Greece and modelled on Sophocles. While the play would be staged at Covent Garden in 1836, Sara commented on the published text:

The spirit of the piece is exclusively modern. People did not ‘sleep and brood o’er their own hearts’ in the days of Sophocles and Eschylus. But what could an imitation of a Greek Play by a modern Englishman be good for [...]? A story really like the Oedipus Tyrannus or Antigone written at this time of day would be like an Automaton Venus made in leather, and moved by springs.¹

While this sentiment recollects Coleridge’s own complaint from an 1811 lecture that ancient drama had ‘fallen into absurdity’ and the events depicted seemed ‘impossible’, Sara indicates a further and final separation of tragedy from Romantic theatre.² Even when Greek tragedy is invoked explicitly, it has been made into something almost unrecognizable, a modern form of melodrama. Shakespeare’s plays suffered a similar fate, as mangled versions of the tragedies persisted on London’s stages for decades after Coleridge’s death.

While Classical tragedy was sidelined into esoteric academia, Coleridge invented ways to sustain the spirit of tragedy outside the university environment: by reinvention in other literary forms, as a cultural relic described in the lectures and criticism, as a philosophical tool and as a measure of historical events in political lectures and essays. It is regrettable that Coleridge never formulated an explicit theory of tragedy despite demonstrating a profound intuition of how Dionysian and Apollonian forces conflict, in addition to his vast scholarly knowledge of plays and poetry. As a lecturer Coleridge manifested his own famous complaint at Kean’s acting; he offered moments of brilliant illumination amidst obscurity. The commonplace that Coleridge was an immethodical scholar explains such inconsistency, but is unjust to his capability to grasp what he considered to be the most effective aspects of tragedy: the key-note struck by the opening scene of *Macbeth*, the empowerment over time and space that Shakespeare’s bare stage allowed him, the account of the origin of ancient drama which, while not original theoretically, is found by R.A. Foakes to be ‘much richer and more detailed than any single possible account so far traced’.³

¹ *The Regions of Sara Coleridge’s Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Peter Swaab (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 137.

² *LoL*, I, p. 350.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43n.

One of Coleridge's close colleagues speculated on what might have occurred had Coleridge been induced to write stage tragedies regularly. Robert Southey acknowledges the success of *Remorse* in correspondence of 1813, and senses his colleague's desire for a career in theatre. Southey identifies Coleridge's earlier rejection by Sheridan as a life-defining incident:

I never doubted that Coleridge's play would meet with a triumphant reception. Be it known now and remembered hereafter, that this self-same play, having had no other alterations made in it now than C. was willing to have made in it then, was rejected in 1797 by Sheridan and Kemble. Had these sapient caterers for the public brought it forward at that time, it is by no means improbable that the author might have produced a play as good every season: with my knowledge of Coleridge's habits I verily believe he would.⁴

Southey's declaration that Coleridge would have produced a play every year – perhaps a sentiment he professed more strongly than he believed – is unusual, and Coleridge's own letters do not suggest that he was so well-disposed to amend *Osorio* in 1797 as Southey implies. Yet it is possible that commercial success in one literary form might have encouraged Coleridge to persist with it, and that the tragic spectacle of *Osorio*, if accepted at Drury Lane in 1797, might have been followed by similar plays.

Novalis believes that the author of his age must harrow the audience with a Dionysian mix of passions: 'The poet is the transcendental physician. Poetry works its ends by means of hurt and titillation, pleasure and pain, error and truth, health and sickness. It mixes all in its great goal of goals—the raising of mankind above itself.'⁵ The vivid sense Coleridge evokes in *Biographia Literaria* of the ancient Athenian audience – of people elevated above quotidian thought by the symbolic conflict onstage – indicates his pursuit of a noble literary ambition that was beyond his own creative power. Perhaps it was too ill-defined, or too mystical a goal to realize in any tangible, worldly manner. Perhaps it was an impossible anachronism. From contemporary German thought Coleridge apprehended the ambitious notion that tragedy might surpass use as an agent of moral instruction to constitute a spiritual rite of purification. This resembles Schelling's call for a new mythology. Like Schelling's idea, Coleridge's vision of the tragic is frustrated, as Nicholas Halmi describes, by a sort of paradox; that the new mythology is an agent of amelioration, but the mythology itself requires improved conditions to thrive.⁶

My emphasis is not that Coleridge's aim of universal improvement using tragedy is unattainable, but lies on the great success with which he adopted the tragic mode. Tragedy pervades his works, and it is necessary to understand tragedy in Coleridge to grasp his oeuvre fully. If Coleridge did not achieve his aim of a

⁴ Quoted in *PW*, III.1, p. 55.

⁵ 'Aphorisms and fragments', p. 69.

⁶ See Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 133–69.

literature that could be an agent of universal amelioration, his tragic vision did yield tangible successes in his life. The extent to which tragedy is infused in his poetical and critical works is remarkable. In his self-conception as author, the search for benefit in misfortune made a proto-Beckettian survivor of Coleridge. By dramatizing himself as a tragic figure he endured difficult circumstances. To Coleridge, this persistence qualified him both as a sagely authority on tragic hardship and a legitimate heir of tragedy as a literary mode. His son Hartley attests to the conviction with which Coleridge assumed this role in a tribute composed in 1847:

The sage, the poet, lives for all mankind,
As long as truth is true, or beauty fair.
(‘Written on the Anniversary of our Father’s Death’, ll. 9–10)

Coleridge’s greatest commercial successes arose from tragedy too. He absorbed, reflected upon and reshaped tragedy in his own plays and the major poems. 1813 was the most financially successful year of Coleridge’s life, and it was the year in which he was most widely acknowledged as a tragic thinker. *Remorse* was staged and published, and obtained positive reviews and significant revenue, and Coleridge delivered important lectures on literature. In some of his most famous discussions he instructed non-Classicists on the origins and characteristics of ancient drama, called for higher standards in his comments on inferior plays from Beaumont and Fletcher to Koetzebue and changed the dominant critical interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedies. Strangely, these achievements seemed to merge in Coleridge’s mind. In correspondence he described a dream-like movement from the tragic arena of the lecture hall to that of the theatre. This was Coleridge’s ideal tragic-world, with no division or transition between settings. He created one audience, and by implication one literary pursuit, as Timothy Webb observes:

It is almost as if the evening in the lecture room and the evening in the theatre had become one and Coleridge’s ‘Lecture Box’ and his box in the theatre had been fused by the synthetic powers of his imagination into a point of elevation for the receipt of admiration and applause.⁷

Webb acknowledges that to win ‘admiration and applause’ was not Coleridge’s only motivation, and interprets Coleridge’s letter as an expression of hope that ‘the contemporary stage could still be rescued from the vitiating influences and pressures of a more vulgar kind of popularity’.⁸ While Coleridge’s hopes for Romantic theatre to return to the ‘classical’ may have been misplaced, the correspondence is permeated by feelings of optimism, both spiritual and practical, that Coleridge derived from his experiences as a playwright and lecturer. Literature was capable of improving its audience as well as author, and from recent success Coleridge was able to provide for his family. Typically, Coleridge invoked grudging

⁷ ‘The Romantic Poet and the Stage’, pp. 18–19

⁸ *Ibid.*

commentators to enhance his achievements, adding triumph over adversaries to intellectual and creative prowess. He entered and left to the ovations granted to a great actor. In this spirit of excitement it is understandable that Coleridge availed himself of a rare opportunity to boast to his wife:

I concluded my Lectures last night most triumphantly, with loud, long, & enthusiastic applauses at my Entrance, & ditto in yet fuller Chorus as and for some minutes after, I had retired. It was lucky, that (as I never once thought of the Lecture, till I had entered the Lecture Box) the two last were the most impressive, and really the best. I suppose, that no dramatic Author ever had so large a number of unsolicited, unknown, yet *predetermined* Plauditors in the Theatre, as I had on Saturday Night. One of the malignant Papers asserted, that I had collected all the *Saints* from Mile End Turnpike to Tyburn Bar. With so many warm Friends it is impossible in the present state of human Nature, that I should not have many unprovoked & unknown Enemies.—You will have heard, that on my entering the Box on Saturday Night I was discovered by the Pit—& that they all turned their faces towards our Box, & gave a treble cheer of Claps. I mention these things, because it will please Southey to hear that there is a large number of Persons in London, who hail with enthusiasm any prospect of the Stage's being purified & rendered classical. My success, *if* I succeed (of which, I assure you, I entertain doubts in my opinion well-founded, both from the want of a prominent Actor for Ordonio, & from the want of vulgar Pathos in the Play itself—nay, there is not enough even of *true* dramatic Pathos) but if I succeed, I succeed for others as well as for myself.⁹

⁹ CL, III, pp. 430–31.

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